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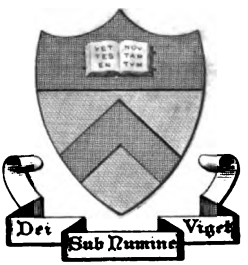

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TRACKS IN THE SNOW

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TRACKS IN THE SNOW

BEING

THE HISTORY OF A CRIME

EDITED FROM THE MS. OF THE REV. ROBERT DRIVER, B.D.

BY

GODFREY R. BENSON

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CHAPTER I.

On the morning of the 29th of January, 1896, Eustace Peters was found murdered in his bed at his house, Grenvile Combe, in the parish of Long Wilton, of which I was then rector.

Much mystery attached to the circumstances of his death. It was into my hands that chance threw the clue to this mystery, and it is for me, if for any one, to relate the facts.

To the main fact of all, the death of my own friend on the eve, as I sometimes fancy, of a fuller blossoming of his powers, my writing cannot give the tragic import due to it, for it touched my own life too nearly. I had come—I speak of myself, for they tell me a narrator must not thrust himself quite into the background—I had come to Long Wilton, three years before from a college tutorship at

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qualified to hold it. Country-bred, fond of country people and of country pastimes, I had not imagined, when I came, either the difficulties of a country parson's task or the false air of sordidness which those difficulties would at first wear to me; still less was I prepared for the loneliness which at first befell me in a place where, though many of my neighbours were wise men and good men, none ever showed intellectual interests or talked with any readiness of high things. The comradeship of Peters, who settled there a few months after me, did more than to put an end to my loneliness; by shrewd, casual remarks, which were always blunt and unexpected but never seemed intrusive or even bore the semblance of advice, he had, without dreaming of it—for he cared very little about the things of the Church—shown me the core of most of my parish difficulties and therewith the way to deal with them. So it was that with my growing affection for the man there was mingled an excessive feeling of mental dependence upon him. So it was that upon that January morning a great blank entered into my life. Matters full of interest, in my pursuits of the weeks and

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months that went before, are gone from my memory like dreams. My whole sojourn at Long Wilton, important as it was to me, is a thing dimly remembered, like a page of some other man's biography. Even as I call to mind that actual morning I cannot think of the immediate horror, only of the blank that succeeded and remains. I believe that no one, upon whom any like loss has come suddenly, will wonder if I take up my tale in a dry-eyed fashion. I can use no other art in telling it but that of letting the facts become known as strictly as may be in the order in which they became known to me.

Eustace Peters, then, was a retired official of the Consular Service, and a man of varied culture and experience—too much varied, I may say. He had been at Oxford shortly before my time. I gathered from the school prizes on his library shelves that he went there with considerable promise; but he left without taking his degree or accomplishing anything

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Oxford, except its distinctive shyness, and had, characteristically, begun the studies of his later years in surroundings less conducive to study. He left Oxford upon getting some appointment in the East. Whether this first appointment was in a business house or in the Consular Service, where exactly it had been and what were the later stages of his career, I cannot tell, for he talked very little of himself. Evidently, however, his Eastern life had been full of interest for him, and he had found unusual enjoyment in mingling with and observing the strange types of European character which he met among his fellow-exiles, if I may so call them. He had ultimately left the Consular Service through illness or some disappointment, or both. About that time an aunt of his died and left him the house, Grenvile Combe, at Long Wilton, in which a good deal of his boyhood had been spent. He came there, as I have said, soon after my own arrival, and stayed on, not, as it seemed to me, from any settled plan. There he passed much of his time in long country rambles (he had been, I believe, a keen sportsman, and had now become a keen naturalist), much of it in various studies,

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chiefly philosophic or psychological. He was writing a book on certain questions of psychology, or, perhaps I should say, preparing to write it, for the book did not seem to me to progress. My wife and I were convinced that he had a love story, but we gathered no hint of what it may have been. He was forty-three when he died.

This is, I think, all that I need now set down as to the personality of the murdered man. But I cannot forbear to add that, while his interrupted career and his somewhat desultory pursuits appeared inadequate to the reputation which he had somehow gained for ability, he certainly gave me the impression of preserving an uncompromisingly high standard, a keenly if fitfully penetrating mind and a latent capacity for decisive action. As I write these words it occurs to me that he would be living now if this impression of mine had not been shared by a much cleverer man than I.

On the 28th my wife was away from home, and I had supper at Grenvile Combe, going there about seven o'clock. There were three other guests at supper, James Callaghan, C.I.E., William Vane-Cartwright, and one

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Melchior Thalberg. Callaghan was an old school-fellow of Peters, and the two, though for years they must have seen each other seldom, appeared to have always kept up some sort of friendship. I knew Callaghan well by this time, for he had been staying three weeks at Grenvile Combe, and he was easy to know, or rather easy to get on with. I should say that I liked the man, but that I am seldom sure whether I like an Irishman, and that my wife, a far shrewder judge than I, could not bear him. He was a great, big-chested Irishman, of the fair-haired, fresh-coloured type, with light blue eyes. A weather-worn and battered countenance (contrasting with the youthful erectness and agility of his figure), close-cut whiskers and a heavy greyish moustache, a great scar across one cheek-bone and a massive jaw, gave him at first a formidable appearance. The next moment this might seem to be belied by something mobile about his mouth and the softness of his full voice; but still he bore the aspect of a man prone to physical violence. He was plausible; very friendly (was it, one asked, a peculiarly loyal sort of friendliness or just the reverse); a copious talker by fits and starts, with a great

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wealth of picturesque observation—or invention. Like most of my Irish acquaintance he kept one in doubt whether he would take an exceptionally high or an exceptionally low view of any matter; unlike, as I think, most Irishmen, he was the possessor of real imaginative power. He had (as I gathered from his abundant anecdotes) been at one time in the Army and later in the Indian Civil Service. In that service he seemed to have been concerned with the suppression of crime, and to have been lately upon the North-West Frontier. He was, as I then thought, at home on leave, but, as I have since learned, he had retired. Some notable exploit or escapade of his had procured him the decoration which he wore on every suitable and many unsuitable occasions, but it had also convinced superior authorities that he must on the first opportunity be shelved.

Vane-Cartwright, with nothing so distinctive in his appearance, was obviously a more remark-

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had formerly had something to do with the far East, and now had considerable dealings with Italy. He had acquired, I knew, quickly but with no whisper of dishonour, very great wealth; and he was about, as I gathered from some remark of Peters, to marry a very charming young lady, Miss Denison, who was then absent on the Riviera. He had about a fortnight before come down to the new hotel in our village for golf, and had then accidentally met Peters who was walking with me. I understood that he had been a little junior to Peters at Oxford, and had since been acquainted with him somewhere in the East. Peters had asked him to dinner at his house, where Callaghan was already staying. I had heard Peters tell him that if he came to those parts again he must stay with him. I had not noted the answer, but was not surprised afterwards to find that Vane-Cartwright, who had returned to London the day after I first met him, had since come back rather suddenly, and this time to stay with Peters. He now struck me as a cultured man, very different from Peters in all else but resembling him in the curious range and variety of his knowledge, reserved

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and as a rule silent but incisive when he did speak.

Thalberg, though not the most interesting of the company, contributed, as a matter of fact, the most to my enjoyment on that occasion. I tried hard some days later to recall my impressions of that evening, of which every petty incident should by rights have been engraven on my memory, but the recollection, which, so to speak, put all the rest out, was that of songs by Schubert and Schumann which Thalberg sang. I drew him out afterwards on the subject of music, on which he had much to tell me, while Vane-Cartwright and our host were, I think, talking together, and Callaghan appeared to be dozing. Thalberg was of course a German by family, but he talked English as if he had been in England from childhood. He belonged to that race of fair, square-bearded and square-foreheaded German business men, who look so much alike to us, only he was smaller and looked more insignificant than most of them, his eyes were

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I remember having for some reason puzzled myself as to how Vane-Cartwright regarded him.

I must at this point add some account of the other persons who were in or about Peters' house. There were two female servants in the house; an elderly cook and housekeeper, Mrs. Travers, who was sharp-visaged and sharp-tongued, but who made Peters very comfortable, and a housemaid, Edith Summers, a plain, strong and rather lumpish country girl, who was both younger and more intelligent than she looked. It subsequently appeared that these two were in the house the whole evening and night, and, for all that can be known, asleep all night in the servants' quarters, which formed an annex to the house connected with it by a short covered way. In a cottage near the gate into the lane lived a far more notable person, Reuben Trethewy, the gardener and doer of odd jobs, a short, sturdy, grizzled man, of severe countenance, not over clean. Peters was much attached to him for his multifarious knowledge and skill. He had been a seaman at some time, had been, it seemed, all sorts of things in all sorts of places, and was emphatically a handy man. He was

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as his name implies a Cornishman, and had come quite recently to our neighbourhood, to which in the course of a roving existence he was attracted by the neighbourhood of his uncle, Silas Trethewy, a farmer who lived some three miles off. He was now a man of Methodistical professions, and most days, to do him justice, of Methodistical practice; but I, who was perhaps prejudiced against him by his hostility to the Church, believed him to be subject to bitter and sullen moods, knew that he was given to outbursts of drinking, and heard from his neighbours that drink took him in a curious way, affecting neither his gait, nor his head, nor his voice, nor his wits, but giving him a touch of fierceness which made men glad to keep out of his way. With him lived his wife and daughter. The wife was, I thought, a decent woman, who kept her house straight and who came to church; but I had then no decided impression about her, though she had for some time taught in my Sunday school, and had once or twice favoured me with a long letter giving her views about it. The daughter was a slight, childish-looking girl, whom I knew well, because she was about to become a pupil teacher, and who

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was a most unlikely person to play a part in a story of this kind.

Our party that evening broke up when, about ten o'clock, I rose to go; and Thalberg, whose best way to the hotel lay through the village, accompanied me as far as the Rectory, which was a quarter of a mile off and was the nearest house in the village. We walked together talking of German poetry and what not, and I cannot forget the disagreeable sense which came upon me in the course of our talk, that a layer of stupidity or of hard materialism, or both, underlay the upper crust of culture which I had seemed to find in the man when we had spoken of music. However, we parted good friends at the Rectory gate, and I was just going in when I recollected some question about the character of a candidate for Confirmation, on which I had meant to have spoken to Peters that night. I returned to his house and found him still in his library. The two guests who were staying in the house had already gone to bed. I got the information and advice which I had wanted—it was about a wild but rather attractive young fellow who had once looked after a horse which Peters had kept, but who

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was now a groom in the largest private stables in the neighbourhood. As I was leaving, Peters took up some books, saying that he was going to read in bed. He stood with me for a moment at the front door looking at the frosty starlight. It was a clear but bitterly cold night. I well remember telling him as we stood there that he must expect to be disturbed by unusual noises that night, as a great jollification was taking place at the inn up the road, and my parishioners, who realised the prelate's aspiration for a free rather than a sober England, would return past his house in various stages of riotous exhilaration. He said that he had more sympathy with them than he ought to have, and that in any case they should not disturb him. Very likely, he added, he would soon be asleep past rousing.

And so, about a quarter to eleven, I parted from him, little dreaming that no friendly eyes would ever meet his again.

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CHAPTER II.

I WAS up early on the 29th. Snow lay thick on the ground but had ceased falling, and it was freezing hard, when, while waiting for breakfast, I walked out as far as my gate on the village street to see what the weather was like. Suddenly Peters' housemaid came running down to the village on her way, as it proved, to the police-station. Before passing she paused, and breathlessly told me the news. I walked quickly to Peters' house. Several neighbours were already gathering about the gate of the drive but did not enter. I rang the bell, was admitted by the housekeeper and walked straight up to Peters' bedroom. Callaghan and Vane-Cartwright were there already, the former half-

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pleasant-faced young constable, who brought with him the village doctor, an ambitious, up-to-date youth who had lately come to those parts.

I have some little difficulty in saying what I then observed; for indeed, though I looked intently enough on the dead face and figure, and noticed much about them that is not to my present purpose, I took in for myself very little that bore on that problem of detection which has since interested me so much. I cannot now distinguish the things which I really saw upon hearing the others mention them from the things which I imagine myself seeing because I knew they were mentioned then or later. In fact I saw chiefly with the eyes of the Sergeant, who set about his inquiries with a quiet promptitude that surprised me in one whom I knew only as a burly, steady, slow-speaking, heavy member of the force.

There was little to note about the barely furnished room which showed no traces of disorder. On the top of some drawers on the left

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small table on the other side of the bed stood a candlestick, the candle burnt to the socket; by it lay two closed books. Under the table near the bed lay, as if it had fallen from the dead man's hand or off his bed, a book with several leaves crumpled and torn, as if, in his first alarm, or as he died, Peters had caught them in a spasmodic clutch. I looked to see what it was, merely from the natural wish to know what had occupied my friend's mind in his last hour. It was Borrow's *Bible in Spain*. When I saw the title an indistinct recollection came to me of some very recent mention of the book by some one, and with it came a faint sense that it was important I should make this recollection clear. But either I was too much stunned as yet to follow out the thought, or I put it aside as a foolish trick of my brain, and the recollection, whatever it was, is gone. The position of the body and the arrangement of the pillows gave no sign of any struggle having taken place.

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this myself, and I cannot be sure that anybody noted it accurately at the time.

The surgeon stepped quickly to the body, slightly raised the left arm, drew aside the already open jacket of the sleeping suit, and silently indicated the cause of death. This was a knife, a curious, long, narrow, sharp knife for surgical use, which the murderer had left there, driven home between two of his victim's ribs. I say "the murderer," for the surgeon's first words were, "Not suicide". I had no suspicion of suicide, but thought that he pronounced this judgment rather hastily, and that the Sergeant was right when he asked him to examine the posture of the body more closely. He did so, still, as I thought, perfunctorily, and gave certain reasons which did not impress either my judgment or my memory. I was more convinced by his remark that he had studied in Berlin and was familiar with the appearances of suicide. I may say at once that it appeared afterwards, at the inquest, that there was reason to think that Peters had not had such a knife, for he never

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cautions against being traced, by carefully obliterating the maker's name and other marks on it with a file.

In the midst of our observations in the room a vexatious interruption happened. I have forgotten to say that the servants had been sent out of the room by the police-sergeant, and that, almost immediately after, the constable who brought the doctor had been sent down to examine the outside of the house. For some reason he was slow in setting about this; it is possible that he stopped to talk to the servants, but in any case, he went out through the kitchen, and explored first the back of the house, where he thought he knew of an easy way of making an entrance. Meanwhile the neighbours, who had collected about the gate, had been drawn by their curiosity into the garden, and by the time the constable had got round to the front of the house several were wandering about the drive and the lawn which lay between it and the road. They had no more harmful intention than that of gazing and gaping at the windows, but it led to the very serious consequence that a number of tracks had now been made in the snow which might very possibly frustrate a

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search for the traces of the criminal. This the Sergeant now noticed from the window.

As for the actual carriage-drive I was fortunately able to remember (and it was the only useful thing that I did observe for myself) that when I had arrived there had been no footmarks between the gate and the front door except the unmistakable print of the goloshes worn by the housemaid on her way to call the police. But the tracks on the lawns and elsewhere about the house might cause confusion.

Upon seeing what was happening the Sergeant asked Vane-Cartwright, Callaghan and myself to await him in Peters' study, while he went out to drive away the intruders, to make the constable keep others out and to pursue his own investigations. While we waited Vane-Cartwright, who had spoken little but seemed to watch all proceedings very attentively, made the sensible suggestion that we should look for Peters' will, as we ought to know who were his executors. We consulted the housekeeper, who pointed out the drawer in which the few papers of importance were kept, and there we soon found a will in a sealed envelope. The first few lines, which were all that we read, showed me

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that, as I had expected, I was Peters' executor along with an old friend of his whom I had never met but who, I believed, as was the fact, now lived in America.

The Sergeant now rejoined us; he had discovered nothing outside, and, though the tracks of the intruders made it difficult to be certain, he believed that there was nothing to discover: he thought that the murderer had approached the house before the snow began to fall, and he found no sign that he had entered the house in the manner of a housebreaker. He had, I must say, taken a very short time about his search. He wished now that the servants should be summoned, as of course it was necessary to make inquiries about the movements of all persons connected with the house. But he was here delayed by Callaghan who had matters of importance to relate.

He and Vane-Cartwright had been disturbed during the night in a notable manner. They had actually had an alarm of murder, and curiously enough a false and even ludicrous alarm. About 11.30 o'clock they had been roused by loud shouting outside the house, amid which Callaghan declared that he had distinguished a

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cry of murder. He had come tumbling out of his room, calling Vane-Cartwright, who slept in the next room, and who immediately joined him in the passage. Without waiting to call Peters, whose room was some distance from theirs and from the staircase by which they descended (for there were two staircases in the main part of the house), they went to the front door and opened it. The flash of a bull's-eye lantern in the road, the policeman's voice quietly telling some revellers to go home and the immediate cessation of the noise, showed them that they had been roused by nothing more serious than the drunken uproar which I had predicted to Peters would disturb him. The two men had returned to their rooms after locking the front door again; they had noticed that the library door was open and the lights out in that room; they had noticed also as they went upstairs (this time by the other staircase) light shining through the chink under Peters' bedroom door; and they had heard him knock out the ashes of a pipe against the mantelpiece. The pipe now lay on the mantelpiece; and, of course, that particular noise is unmistakable. They concluded that, though he was awake and probably reading, he had not

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thought the noise outside worth noticing. Callaghan added that he himself had lain awake some time, and that for half an hour afterwards there had been occasionally sounds of talking or shouting in the lane, once even a renewal of something like the first uproar.

The report subsequently received from the constable who had been on duty along the road that night confirmed the above, and a little reflexion made it appear that the disturbance outside had nothing to do with the murder. In fact the only thing connected with this incident which much impressed me at the time was Callaghan's manner in relating it. He had up to now been very silent, he now began to talk with furious eagerness. He readily saw and indeed suggested that the disturbance which he related was of little consequence. But having to tell of it he did so with a vividness which was characteristic of him, so that one saw the scene as he described it, saw indeed more than there was to see, for he spoke of the ground already white and the snow falling in thick

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angrily persisting, and the Sergeant appealed to Vane-Cartwright, who up till now had said little, merely confirming Callaghan's narrative at various points with a single syllable or with a nod of his head, but who now said that Callaghan was wrong about the snow. He added the benevolent explanation that Callaghan, who was really much excited, had combined the impressions of their false alarm over night with those of their all too real alarm in the morning.

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CHAPTER III.

HEREUPON Callaghan, who had a more important matter to relate, changed the subject abruptly by saying, "Sergeant, have your eye on that man Trethewy". He told us that, ten days before, Trethewy had quarrelled with his master. Peters, he said, had met Trethewy in the drive, at a point which he indicated, and, noticing a smell of spirits, had firmly but quietly taken him to task, telling him that his occasional drinking was becoming a serious matter. Callaghan had come up at the moment and had heard Trethewy, who was by his account dangerous with drink at the time, answer with surly insolence, making some malicious counter-insinuation against his master's own habits, exploding for a moment into wild anger, in which he seemed about to strike his master, but to refrain upon catching sight of Callaghan's powerful frame beside him, then subsiding again into surliness and finally withdrawing to his own cottage with

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muttered curses and a savage threat. This was the substance of Callaghan's statement. But there was a great deal in it besides substance; the whole of the conversation, from the moment at which Callaghan came up, was professedly repeated word for word with a slight but dramatic touch of mimicry, and the tone and temper of master and man were vividly rendered. I can never myself remember the words of any conversation, and for that reason I am unable now to set out Callaghan's narrative, and was unable at the time to put faith in its accuracy. Here and there a phrase was presumably truly given because it was given in Trethewy's own dialect, but once at least the unhappy Trethewy was made responsible for a remark which he surely never made, for it was pure Irish, and indeed I think it was the very threat of picturesque vengeance which I had myself heard Callaghan address to a big boy in the street who was on the point of thrashing a little boy. One detail of the description was a manifest mistake. Callaghan indicated (truly, I have some reason to think) the spot in the drive

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thewy with his hand upon a young tree. Now Peters had planted that tree with Trethewy several days later, just before the frost set in; and other details in the story seemed equally incredible. "Ever since then," concluded Callaghan, "I have seen murder in that fellow's eye. Mind you, I have had to do with murderers in India. Three times have I marked that look in a man's eye, and each time the event has proved me right, though in one case it was long after. I tell you this man Trethewy——" But here Vane-Cartwright stopped him. He had already disconcerted Callaghan a little by pointing out the Hibernicisms that adorned the alleged remarks of Trethewy; and now he quelled him with the just, but, as I thought, unseasonably expressed, sarcasm, that if he had seen murder portended in Trethewy's glance it would have been a kind attention to have given his host warning of the impending doom. He went on to insist warmly on the totally different impres-

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Sergeant who said, "Really, sir, I do not think I ought to listen now to what any gentleman thinks of a man's manner of speaking, not if it is nothing more than that".

The Sergeant then sent for Trethewy. I had wondered that we had not seen him before, the explanation was that he had been away at night, had returned home very late, and so had come late to the house in the morning and was still doing the pumping when the Sergeant sent for him. However, he seemed at last to have slept off the effect of whatever his nocturnal potion had been, and he gave a clear account of his movements without hesitation and with a curiously impressive gravity. He had suddenly made up his mind at dusk on the previous evening to go to his uncle's house, where there was a gathering of friends and kinsfolk, which he had at first intended to avoid. They had made a night of it. He had started home, as several, whom he named, could testify, at four o'clock in the morning (the church clock near his uncle's was then striking), and the violence of the snowstorm was abating. He had come across the moor by a track of which he knew the bearings well.

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This track struck into the grass lane which passed near the back of the house at the other side of the pasture, and which curved round into the road joining it close by Trethewy's cottage. As he came along the lane a man on horseback leading a second horse had overtaken him and exchanged greetings with him. He had seen the man before, but could not tell his name or dwelling or where he was going. The snow had done falling when he reached his cottage. Once home, he had turned in and slept sound till he was roused soon after eight by his wife with the news of the murder. He had seen nothing, heard nothing, guessed nothing which could throw light on the dreadful deed of the night. Trethewy was dismissed with a request from the Sergeant to keep in his house, where he could instantly be found if information was wanted from him. This he did.

The two servants were now summoned, and the Sergeant had a number of questions to ask them. The housekeeper in particular had a good deal to say about her master's ways,

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which I, who was by this time becoming exhausted, had little patience to follow. Was the candle which was found burnt out a new candle the evening before, or a candle-end, or what? The question was asked of the housekeeper, but the housemaid answered with promptitude that it was a full new candle which she had herself put there last evening, shortly before the master went to bed. We learnt also that Peters was very irregular about going to bed; sometimes he would take a fit of sitting up, working or reading, night after night, and sometimes he would go to bed early, but always he had a book with him and lay awake for a while (often for hours and hours, as he had confessed to her) reading it after he went to bed. Sometimes it would be a story book, but more often one of those dull books of his; and much more on the same subject would have been forthcoming if the housekeeper had not at last been stopped, without, as I thought, having told us anything of importance.

At last I went home, to find the churchwarden irate at my lateness for an appointed interview about the accounts of the dole charities, and to have a forgotten but much-

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needed breakfast pressed upon me. I would rather have been alone, but Callaghan gave me his company as far as my house, and expounded his view about Trethewy all the way. He left me at my door to go in search of Thalberg, whom up to that moment we had all forgotten.

In about three-quarters of an hour Callaghan burst in on me. Where he had breakfasted, if at all, I neglected to ascertain, but he had contrived to get shaved at the village barber's, and he now looked fresh and seemed keen. He was this time in a state of great indignation against Thalberg. He had been unable to see him, but had ascertained that he was still at the hotel, and that he had heard the news of Peters' murder, but had seemed little interested in it, and had rejected the landlady's suggestion that he might like to go up to the house to learn the last news of his unhappy friend. It appeared that Thalberg had shut himself up in his room ever since, but had ordered a fly to drive him to the afternoon train at the station five miles off. The landlady and Callaghan seemed to have agreed that there was something peculiarly heartless in his omission to call at Peters' or to make any inquiries.

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Callaghan soon left me, returning, as I thought, to Grenvile Combe, while I endeavoured to settle myself to prepare my sermon for the next day, Sunday, with a mind hardly indeed awake as yet to the horror of the morning or to the loss I had sustained, much less able in any connected way to think over the meaning of our observations, but mechanically asking over and over again whether it was reasonable that my now confirmed aversion from Thalberg was somehow associated in my mind with the object of our investigations.

I say "our" investigations; as a matter of fact I had no intention whatever at that time of busying myself with investigation at all. In the first place I was quite aware that I had no aptitude for such work, and in the second, and far more important place, I, who hold it most undesirable that a clergyman should be a magistrate, could not but feel it still less fitting that he should be a detective in his own parish. But I could not escape altogether. About 2.45 I received a visit from the Sergeant, a much-embarrassed man now, for he brought with him the Superintendent, who had driven over in hot haste to take charge of the inquiry.

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The Sergeant had zealously endeavoured to rise to the occasion, and to my unpractised judgment seemed to have shown much sense. Perhaps his zeal did not endear him the more to the keen, and as I guessed, ambitious gentleman who now took over the inquiry, but any way he had been guilty of real negligence in allowing the snow round the house to be trampled over by trespassers, and at this the Superintendent, who had rapidly gathered nearly all that the Sergeant had to tell, seemed greatly exasperated; moreover, the Superintendent had noticed, if the reader has not, that the public-house had been open very late the previous night. His present errand was to ask me to come to the house, not because I was the deceased man's legal personal representative, but because he foresaw possible explorations in which my topographical knowledge of my large and scattered parish might be of use.

We returned to Grenvile Combe, and the

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denly he opened the door and called up the housemaid; she arrived at length, the housekeeper, who fetched her, being refused admittance. "Why," said the Superintendent pointing to the window, "is that window latch unfastened and the other fastened?" The housemaid said shyly but quite decidedly that she did not know, but this she did know, that both had been fastened by her last night, that one of the few matters in which her master showed any fussiness was insisting that a window should be latched whenever it was shut, and that he never neglected this himself. Why had the Sergeant not noticed this in the morning? Poor Sergeant Speke, already crestfallen, had no answer; at least he made none. Our stay in the room was short. The Superintendent, I believe, returned there that evening and spent an hour or two in searching microscopically for traces of the criminal; but now he was in haste to search the garden. "I shall begin," he said, "at the point under that window. It is past three already. Come on, there is not a minute of daylight to be lost." At the point under the unlatched window he made a startling discovery, startling in that it had not been made before.

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CHAPTER IV.

I AM now driven to attempt the task, which I had hoped to escape, of a topographical description. To begin with what is of least importance for the present. The village of Long Wilton lies in the valley of a little stream, and two roads run Northwards from the village along the opposite sides of the valley. The road along the Western side leads up a steep hill to the church, built at some distance from the village for the benefit of the former owners of the manor house. Just beyond the church lies a house which was the manor house, but has now lost its identity in improvements and extensions and become a new and not very beautiful hotel. This hotel owes its origin

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not thank the Company for a liberal contribution made for the reseating of the church in the days of my predecessor. The hotel spoils the view from Grenvile Combe, across the valley. Its upper windows command a prospect of the whole of Peters' grounds. This, however, does not concern us yet.

The road on the other side of the valley leads to some outlying hamlets which form part of the parish. On the right hand of it, as you go Northwards, the ground rises steeply towards a wide tract of moorland. About a quarter of a mile out of the village a grass lane diverges from the road and leads in a North-Westerly direction. Grenvile Combe is a little property of some ten acres lying between the grass lane and the road, and bordered on the North by a fir plantation which extends from the road to the lane. The cottage, or lodge, which was then Trethewy's, stands close to the Southern corner of the grounds, where the grass lane turns off; and the gate of the drive is close by. The stables, which Peters had not

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out upon a steeply rising pasture field which lies along the grass lane. The front looks (across the drive, a strip of lawn and the road) to the stream and to the church and that ugly hotel on the little hill beyond. Peters' study was in the front of the house at the North-East corner of the main block of the building, in other words, it was on your left as you entered at the front door; and his bedroom was just above it. A path leads from the drive under the North wall of the house to the kitchen entrance, and on the left of this path, as one goes towards the kitchen, stands an out-building in which is the pump. A shrubbery of berberis and box and laurel, starting near the house, just across the path, skirts round the blind end of the drive, and straggling along under the low brick wall, which separates the drive and front lawn from the fir plantation, ends at a fine old yew tree which stands just by the road. All along the front of the house there is a narrow "half area," intended to give so much light and air, as servants were once held to deserve, to the now disused dungeons where the dinners of former owners had been cooked.

In that area right below the unlatched window

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we saw a ladder lying, a short light ladder, but just long enough for an active man to have reached the window by it. Now the snow had come with a North-East wind, and any one who may have wrestled with my essay in topography will readily understand that just here was a narrow tract where very little snow had fallen and the frozen ground was mostly bare. There was accordingly no clear indication that the ladder had ever actually been reared towards the window, but it might have been. The path to the kitchen door was clear enough too, and a man might have picked his way just thereabouts and left not a footprint behind. Casting about like a hound, the Superintendent had found some footprints near, before his companions had begun seeking; footprints pointing both ways. He immediately returned to the house and got some bundles of chips for kindling, with which to mark the place of the footprints he discovered. Callaghan had joined us, and he and I and the Sergeant followed the Superintendent, keeping, as he bade us, carefully a little behind him. In a moment it was plain that some man had climbed the wall out of the fir plantation, not far from the yew tree, that he had crept along

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the edge of the lawn, planting his feet most of the way under the edge of the berberis shrub, but now and then, for no obvious cause, but perhaps in guilty haste, deviating on to the lawn where his tracks now showed in the snow. He had made his stealthy way, not quite stealthy enough for him, round the end of the drive; no doubt he had found the ladder somewhere up that side path, no doubt he had opened the latch in the well-known way, entered through the window, done the deed, slipped out and left his ladder where we found it; and there were his footprints, returning by the way he came to the same point in the wall.

Here we paused for a moment. Not a word was said as to the inferences that we all drew from those few footprints, but the Superintendent sharply asked the Sergeant, "Why was that trail not found and followed to an end this morning?" Poor Sergeant Speke looked for an instant like a detected criminal, but he pulled

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wall and in the fir plantation. And there we paused again, for the fir boughs also had kept out the snow, and the carpet of fir needles showed no distinct traces of feet. Eventually —it seemed a long time but it was a short time —we found where the fugitive had emerged from the fir plantation over some iron hurdles into Peters' field and along a little sort of gulley that there ran from the plantation half-way along the field. "Not the best place to break cover, but their wits are not always about them," said the Superintendent, and he pointed to a wedge-shaped snowless tract which, caused by some extra shelter from the wind, extended from the wall, tapering towards a clump of gorse bushes. Then he sped on the trail, making the rest of us spread out to make sure that there were no other tracks across the field. Southwards, right along the field, the trail led till he, and we rejoining him, scrambled out of the field, where our quarry must have scrambled, into the green lane about two hundred yards from Trethewy's cottage. Thus far, but no farther; along the now well-trodden snow of

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of lost daylight," said the Superintendent, now depressed. "Was this a likely way for a man making for the moors, Rector?" "You need not look that far," said Callaghan; "those footprints were the man Trethewy's. Down at the cottage yonder," he added for the Superintendent's benefit. "They are the track of hobnailed boots, sir," said the Superintendent, "that's all that they are." "Do you see that pattern?" said Callaghan; and there was something odd about the pattern of the nails in the last footprint just beneath our eyes. "You never saw it in any footprint before, but I did, and it is the pattern I saw in Trethewy's footmark not a fortnight ago when last there was snow." He was strung up again now, and he had strangely quick eyes when he was strung up. "That is the man's footprint," he said, "and there are the man's boots." Some way along the ditch, under brambles and among old kettles and sardine tins and worn-out boots (for plentiful rubbish had been dumped just here), lay quite a good pair of boots, old boots truly, but not boots that I should have thrown away, whatever a poorer man might do. The Superintendent had them instantly. "Odd they are so full of

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snow," said Callaghan; "he did not lace them or they were much too big for him. But what possessed him to throw them away, anyhow?" "Oh," said the Superintendent, "they mostly have plenty of half-clever ideas. It takes a stupid one to escape me, sir," he interposed to me with a sort of chuckle, for he had lost no more time in appropriating the discovery than he had done in picking up the boots. "The clever idea this time," he added, "was just this —the lane is trampled enough now, but in the morning, when fewer feet had been along it, you might have picked out the print of a particular boot by careful looking. But a fellow in his socks could shuffle along among the few foot-marks and make no trace that you could swear to; only he would not go far like that by day-light when the people he passed would notice his feet. Of course it was madness not to hide the boots better, but I expect he had taken a good deal of liquor to screw himself up to his work. Is that Mr. Trethewy's house, sir?" for we were by this time close to it.

I had been keen enough, as any man would have been, from the moment we saw the ladder till now, but I hope it will be easily understood

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why I did not accompany the hunters to Trethewy's cottage. I went back to the house to find Vane-Cartwright, who had stayed there, as it seemed, reading gloomily and intently all the afternoon, and to arrange for the prompt removal of him and Callaghan from that now cheerless house to the Rectory. The housekeeper, oddly enough, was quite ready to stay, and she kept the housemaid with her.

Callaghan, who soon came back, said that Trethewy had come to the door of his house when they knocked. "Mr. Trethewy," said the Superintendent, "do you know these boots?" He answered composedly enough, "They look like my boots, but I do not know where you found them". Here Mrs. Trethewy came forward and said in a very unconvincing tone (so Callaghan insisted), "Why, that is the pair I have looked for high and low these three days. Do not you remember, Reuben, how angry you were they were lost?"

We left the house for the Rectory soon (my man was to come with a barrow for the luggage), but before we left, one further piece of evidence had accidentally come to my knowledge. I

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learnt from something which the housekeeper was saying to the maid that the ladder was one which was always kept in the pump-house, that the pump-house was always kept locked, and that Trethewy kept the key.

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CHAPTER V.

On Wednesday, the 2nd of February, Candlemas Day, I read the burial service over my friend's body. I will not dwell upon what that service was to me, but like many funerals of my friends it is associated in my mind with the singing of birds. The inquest had taken place on the Monday and Tuesday, and while it clearly established the fact that the death had been caused by murder, not suicide, nothing was laid before the jury which would have justified a verdict against any particular person. I believe that some doubt had arisen as to the identification of the boots. The village shoemaker, whose expert opinion was asked, had said that though he never arranged hobnails in that way himself

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various handicrafts, had cobbled and nailed some boots for a friend, that this friend was the man whose hobnails had been noticed by the shoemaker, and that he had been safe out of the way at the time of the murder. Moreover—perhaps I forgot it, perhaps I assumed that they would find it out for themselves and preferred that they should—anyhow I had not mentioned to the police that I heard Trethewy alone had had access to the ladder (they found it out later).

Callaghan and Vane-Cartwright stayed with me for the funeral. A large crowd of merely impertinent people, as I confess I regarded them, collected from the neighbourhood and even from far away for the occasion. Two only of Peters' family were there, or could have been there. He had two nephews in the Army, but they were then in India. The rest of his near belongings were an old gentleman (a cousin of his father's, whom I had heard Peters himself describe as a relative whom he had only met at burials, but whom he regarded as an essential part of the funeral ceremony) and a maiden aunt, his mother's sister. Both of them came; both insisted on staying at the hotel, instead of at the Rectory, for the night before, but they had

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luncheon and tea at the Rectory after the funeral, and departed by the evening train. The old gentleman was, I believe, a retired stipendiary magistrate. Vane-Cartwright very obligingly devoted himself to entertaining him and took him for a walk after luncheon, while Callaghan roamed about, observing the people who had come for the funeral, expecting, as he told me, that there might be something to discover by watching them. I was thus left alone for a while with Peters' aunt, who, by the way, appeared to have known Vane-Cartwright as a boy.

Having with some difficulty overcome her formidable reserve and shyness, I learnt from her much that I had not known about my friend, her nephew, how really remarkable had been the promise of his early days, though he had idled a little at Oxford; and how he had left Oxford prematurely and taken up an appointment abroad, because he felt that his parents

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with an affectionate interest. This contrasted strangely both with her evident indifference on her own account to books and such matters as delighted him, and with the strange calmness with which she seemed to regard his death and the manner of his death. I was becoming greatly attracted by this quiet, lonely old lady, when the return of the cousin and Vane-Cartwright and of Callaghan at the same time put an end to our conversation. Probably it was only that she did not feel equal to the company of such a number of gentlemen, but I half-fancied that some one of the number—I could not guess which, but I suspected it was the old cousin—was antipathetic to her.

I went to London myself that night, returning next afternoon. I had to go and see my wife and children. They had gone soon after Christmas to stay with my wife's father, and she had taken the children for a night to London on their way home. She was compelled to stop there because my daughter, who was delicate, caught a bad chill. It was now so cold for travelling that I urged her to remain in London yet a little longer.

I am not sure why I am being so precise in

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recording our movements at that time. Perhaps it is merely from an impulse to try and live over again a period of my life which was one of great and of increasing; not diminishing, agitation. But having begun, I will proceed.

I returned to my rectory the day after the funeral hoping to be free from any share in a kind of investigation which consorted ill with the ordinary tenour of my work. But of course I could not remove myself from the atmosphere of the crime. To begin with, I had an important interview with Trethewy (which I will relate later) the day after my return. But, besides, rumours of this clue or that, which had been discovered, came to me in the common talk of my parish, for every supposed step towards the discovery of the criminal seemed to be matter of general knowledge. So the crime went with me in my parish rounds, and in the privacy of my house I was still less able to escape from it, for Callaghan was with me, and Callaghan's mind was on fire with the subject.

I discovered very soon that Callaghan, whom I had asked to stay for the funeral, was bent upon staying in the village as long as he could. He conceived that, with the knowledge he pos-

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sessed and his experience in India, he might, if on the spot, be able to contribute to the ends of justice; and he seemed to find a morbid satisfaction, most unlike my own feeling, in being near to the scene of crime and the scene of detection. Moreover, he exhibited an esteem and love for Peters and a desolate grief at his loss which, though I had not known that the two men were quite such friends, I was almost forced to think unaffected. So I readily invited him to stay at the Rectory, and he stayed there some ten days altogether, when he declared that he would put himself upon me no more and would move to the hotel. At the last moment he changed his mind, and said he had taken a fancy to stay at Peters' house if he might. I was persuaded to acquiesce in this, and there he stayed, with occasional absences in London, till nearly a month later, shortly after the time when, as I shall tell, Trethewy was committed for trial at the Assizes.

Vane-Cartwright, who remained quiet and reserved, thanked me very much the night

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agitation or to stay a night longer in Peters' house, would have been a trial for him. He added that he purposed returning to London immediately after the funeral, and after an important City meeting, for which he must stay in England, he was going out to meet his young lady on the Riviera. I suppose that without intending I betrayed before the funeral the fact that I was a little worried by my impending duties as executor, duties which strangely enough I had never had to perform before, and in which I was now a little embarrassed by the absence from England of my fellow-executor and the principal legatees, and by the prospect of having to carry out a charitable bequest which left me a large discretion and might possibly involve litigation. Vane-Cartwright very unobtrusively put me in the way of doing whatever was immediately incumbent on me. I suppose I appeared as grateful as I felt; anyhow, it ended with a delicate suggestion from Vane-Cartwright that he would be very glad to stay at the hotel for a day or two and make himself useful to me in any way that he could. Of course I pressed him to stay at the Rectory, and, in spite of an apparent preference for staying at the hotel, he

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after a while agreed. I was expecting that I might soon be leaving home for some time, as it might be necessary to take my little daughter for a month abroad in a warmer climate, and after that I knew I should be very busy with Confirmation classes and other matters, so that I was anxious to make immediate progress, if I could, with winding up Peters' estate, and was very glad that Vane-Cartwright would stay, as he did stay, at the Rectory. On the Saturday however (a week after the murder) he received a telegram which compelled him to leave that afternoon. I had by this time begun to like him, which I confess I did not at first; men of his stamp, who have long relied on themselves alone and been justified in their reliance, often do not show their attractive qualities till the emergency occurs in which we find them useful.

Trethewy was arrested the day that Vane-Cartwright left. I wondered why he was not arrested earlier (for there did not seem to be any real room for doubt that he had made those footmarks), but I have never ascertained, and

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such an attempt or otherwise. He never did. He sat in his cottage, as I gathered, constantly reading the Bible, but once or twice a day pacing thoughtfully and alone up and down the drive. He did the few necessary jobs for the house with punctuality, but he never lingered in it, never visited the field or the lane, and hardly spoke to any one, except on the day before his arrest, when, to my astonishment (for he was known to be hostile to the Church), he sent for me, and we had the memorable interview to which I have already referred.

During the days before his arrest, as well as after, all sorts of enquiry, of which I knew little, were going on. Thalberg's movements after the murder were traced. Some attempt was made, I believe, to find the man who, according to Trethewy, had passed him with two horses in the lane. But there seems to have been some bungling about this, and the man, about whom there was no real mystery (he was a farm servant who had started off early to take a horse, which his master had sold, to its new owner), was not then found. Two important discoveries were made about Trethewy. After his arrest his cottage was searched, and he was found to

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be the possessor of inconceivably miscellaneous articles. Among them were several weapons which he might naturally have picked up on his travels, but among them (which was more to the point) was a small case of surgical instruments. Two instruments were missing from that case, and the instrument used by the murderer might, though not very neatly, have fitted into one of the vacant places. The case was found, as Callaghan, who contrived to be present, told me, at the back of a shelf in a cupboard filled with all sorts of lumber and litter that had lain there who can say how long. Callaghan, however, professed to have observed, from marks on the dust of the shelf, that the contents of the cupboard had been recently disturbed, in order, he had no doubt, to hide the instrument case at the back of everything.

The other new discovery had occurred two days before. Trethewy's uncle and the guests who had been at his party on that ill-omened night were of course sought and questioned. They all corroborated Trethewy's own account

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and cheerful enough as the evening began, but, as the night and the drinking went on, fell first into melancholy, then into sullenness, lastly and a little before he went home into voluble ferocity. He recurred to the topic, to which his uncle said he had more than once alluded on previous days when he had met him, of his quarrel with Peters, against whom he had conceived an irrational resentment, and he actually, though those who heard him did not take him seriously at the time, uttered threats against his life.

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CHAPTER VI.

I WAS told of this behaviour of Trethewy's by Sergeant Speke the day after the arrest. But it was no surprise to me, for I had come myself to communicate to the police something to the same effect. On mature reflexion I had thought it my duty to report the matter of the interview which I had had with Trethewy some days before. Trethewy had, unsolicited, made a confession to me—not a confession of crime, but a confession of criminal intent.

Unchecked by a warning that I could promise no secrecy as to what he should say, and a reminder of, what he knew full well, that he was in a position of grave danger, he declared to me that he had harboured the thought of killing his master, and, though he had never actually laid hands on him, was as guilty as though he had done so. Starting with this declaration he plunged into a long and uninterrupted discourse

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of which I should find it impossible, even if I wished it, to give an at all adequate report.

As for the matter of his statement: if one were to accept it as true, it was the tale, common enough two centuries ago, but so rarely told now that modern ears find it very hard to take it in, the tale of the ordinary struggle between good and evil in a man, taking an acute and violent form, so that the man feels day by day the alternate mastery of a religious exaltation, which he believes to be wholly good, and of base passions, which, when they come upon him, seem to be an evil spirit driving him as the steam drives an engine. From the manner of the statement, it was very hard to gather how much of it was sincere, impossible to gather whether or not something worse lay concealed behind that which was so strangely confessed. Self-abasement and self-righteousness, the genuine stuff of Puritan enthusiasm, the adulterated stuff of morbid religiousness, sheer cant, manly straightforwardness, pleasure in the opportunity of preaching and that to the parson,—all these things seemed blended together in Trethewy's talk.

On the most favourable view the story came

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to this. A few years before, Trethewy, after a careless life, had become suddenly impressed by deep religious feelings, no less than by precise and inflexible religious views. His conversion, he trusted, had not left his conduct unaffected, but though for a time he walked, as he said, happy in this new light, it had been the beginning, not the end, of his inward warfare. His natural ill-temper, that worst sort of ill-temper which is both sulky and passionate, began to come upon him again in prolonged fits of intense wrath, intensified, I suppose, by reaction from the pitch at which he often strove to live. Besides this, he gave way at times to a keen pleasure in alcohol. He was tempted by what he called a "carnal" pride in the strength of his head for liquor; and I have sometimes observed that drink works its worst havoc upon the very men who may appear to be the least affected by it, bringing about a slow perversion of the deeper motives of action, while for a long time it leaves the judgment unclouded upon those more trivial and obvious matters in which aberration is readily detected. Thus at the time of that altercation with Peters of which Callaghan had been a witness, Trethewy was already brooding

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perversely over some trumpery or altogether fancied grievance. He was deeply under the influence of drink at that moment, and did not know it, but knew he had had enough to make most men drunk. His very worldly pride had therefore been the more offended at the imputation which Peters threw on him. His spiritual pride was offended too by a rebuke from one, whom, though originally fond of him, he had come to regard as a worldling, steeped in mere profane philosophy. He had been enraged to the point of desiring Peters' death, and the threat which Callaghan reported had been actually uttered. He had meant, it may be, nearly nothing by his threat when he uttered it; but, when once this almost insane notion, of killing for such a trifle a man whom normally he liked, had taken shape in words, it recurred to him every time that he was put out, or that a third glass of spirits went to his lips. Perhaps it recurred to him with all the more terrible power because in better moments his conscience was horribly alarmed at his having given in, by so

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of some trifling oversight in the garden to which Peters had called his attention, and I was surprised after what Vane-Cartwright had said to be told that Vane-Cartwright was present on this occasion and had heard the insolent language in which he seems to have addressed Peters. All day and night after that the evil dream had been upon him, and he walked home from his uncle's that night plotting murder. He awoke in the morning calmer, but his wrath still smouldered, till his wife brought him the news that Peters was murdered, when it gave place in a moment to poignant grief for Peters. He could not stir from the cottage; he sat, he tried to pray, he thought, and he saw himself as he was—perhaps not quite as he was, for he saw himself as a man guilty of blood.

He would gladly, I think, have talked with me of his soul, but, with the suspicion which I had in my mind, I did not see how I could say much to him. So, having heard him out, I got away with some pitifully perfunctory remarks. How was I to take this confession? Was the mental history which the man gave of himself a cunning invention for accounting for the known quarrel and the known threats? Was the story true

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with this grave correction that Trethewy had carried out his intent? Was it the simple truth all through? Did it even go beyond the truth in this, that the man's thoughts had never been so black as he made them out? For days these questions occurred frequently to my mind, but my real opinion upon them was fixed almost as soon as I got away from Trethewy. Contrary to my principles I disliked him, I felt strangely little sympathy for his spiritual struggles; but I did not doubt that they were real, and I did not doubt that he was innocent of the crime.

Before Trethewy was brought before the magistrates, a letter arrived which excited my imagination unaccountably, or rather two letters arrived. The day before Vane-Cartwright had left, a letter had arrived for Peters, bearing the postmark of Bagdad. Vane-Cartwright carelessly opened it. He had, I think, at my request, on the day when I was away in London, opened some letters which arrived for Peters'

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"Dear Eustace," it ran, "I am sorry I can tell you nothing about it.—Yours, C. B." Just a week later, after Vane-Cartwright had left, came another letter from the same place, in the same hand, and almost, but not quite, as brief: "Dear Eustace, This time I will not delay my answer. Longhurst sailed in the *Eleanor* and she did not go down. To the best of my belief she still sails the seas. I never liked C.—Yours ever, Charles Bryanston."

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CHAPTER VII.

AFTER several remands, the proceedings against Trethewy before the magistrates came to a close about the end of February. There was nothing much to note about these proceedings, which ended, as I suppose they must have ended, in his being committed for trial. The reader knows by this time pretty nearly the whole case against him. That Peters had been murdered was certain. The accused had had several altercations with the murdered man. In one of them he had expressed a wish to kill him, and he had repeated this wish to others upon the fatal night. Footprints had been found which, as the reader knows, seemed at first sight plainly indicative of his guilt. Then there was the ladder. It was undoubtedly kept before the

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only by the uncorroborated statement of the accused that he had left the key of the pump-house that morning, when summoned to speak to the police, and had forgotten to go back for it until the next day. Lastly, the finding of the instrument case, though not very important, at any rate disposed of any improbability that Trethewy would have had such an instrument as the knife that was used.

I daresay this would have been enough to hang a man if this was all; and against this there was nothing to be set, except the immovable persistency of Trethewy and his wife from the first in the tale which they told.

Nothing, that is, till after he had been committed for trial. But the very evening after his committal, a slight but almost conclusive circumstance was brought to light, and entirely altered the aspect of the case. That evening I received a visit from Peters' housemaid, Edith Summers. She had, she said, something on her mind. She had told a falsehood to the police-

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cause she had been very severely scolded by the housekeeper for forgetting to put fresh candles in the candlestick; and so she had said what was false, not meaning any harm, but thinking for the moment (as she now tried to explain) that it was true, and that she had done what she had intended. She had confessed to the housekeeper since, but the housekeeper had only said she was an impudent girl to have put in her word then, and had better not put it in again. She had gone to the court expecting to be a witness on some small point and determined to make the matter clear then; but she had not been called. She had spoken to a policeman, and had been told to speak to one of the lawyers. She had tried to get the attention of Trethewy's lawyer, but he had been too busy to listen to her.

I am ashamed to say that listening to her rather long explanation, I entirely failed to see the significance of what she told me. I said something quite well intentioned about the evil

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moment. There were, she explained, other candles in the room, but they were new candles, and they were not lighted that night. From this and what we already knew the conclusion was almost inevitable. Peters was murdered before two inches of ordinary candle, which was burning at 11.30 P.M. on the 28th of January, burnt down.

. . . . . .

Stupid as it may seem, I had for some time been convinced of Trethewy's innocence, and yet had never really drawn the necessary inference from it. Of course with the two premisses in my mind—Peters was murdered, Trethewy did not murder him—I had been aware, in a sense, of the conclusion, but it had taken no hold of my attention. Now, however, I had evidence of Trethewy's innocence, which was no longer a private intuition of my own, but was something of which every one must appreciate the force. Perhaps it was from this, perhaps it was from the sentimental effect of having the time of the crime fixed within such narrow limits; anyhow the thought, "Some one other than Trethewy murdered Peters," came upon me with a sudden horror which could hardly have

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been greater if I had only that moment become aware of the original fact of the murder.

I instantly went over in my mind the list of those few who were so placed as to lie within the reach of suspicion. Trethewy could no longer be suspected. Thalberg surely could not. I dismissed the two women servants from my mind immediately. There remained two men—three men—three men, of whom I was one. I knew how easily I could clear myself, for the door had been locked behind me before that candle was lit. But I was the last man known to have seen Peters, and my confused current of thought included me as a man to be suspected. I asked myself of each in turn, is he the guilty man? and in each case I answered no. As I look back now, it seems to me, that the answer "no" did not come to my mind with the same whole-hearted conviction in each case. But I did not in the few moments for which I then reflected, I did not till long after do more than go round in this circle: One of us three men murdered Peters. Was it—— each of us

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ing for Peters' death without the guilt of any of us. The plainest reasons bade me answer yes, and yet again I answered no. And so back round the circle.

But the girl was with me and I could not keep her waiting for ever. I arrested my mental circle where it began, at the thought: it seems Peters was murdered while two inches of ordinary candle, lighted before 11.30 P.M. on the 28th of January, burnt out. I started up to take the girl at once to see the police, but on a sudden idea I desisted. I wrote a note to the housekeeper, asking that the girl should again come to see me at eight in the evening, and I sent a message to the police-sergeant, asking him to come at the same time. Of course I had often interviewed him on parish matters, and having got him settled into the arm-chair in my study, in which I could usually put him at his ease, I fired upon him the question, "Sergeant, were those tracks, which we found, really there when you came to Mr. Peters' house in the morning?" Now Sergeant Speke was a very honest man, but he was (most properly, I am sure) a creature of discipline, and his answer threw, for me, a flood of light on the problem

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how it is that the very best of the police are so ready to back up one another. He answered immediately and with conviction: "Well, you see, sir, it is not for me to judge". The answer was on the face of it preposterous. He alone had searched the front of the house that morning, and it was for him alone, of all men, to say whether the tracks were there. He obviously did not see this at all, and I was wise enough to let go an opportunity for moralising to him. I beguiled him, with a glass of wine and other devices of the tempter, into feeling himself off duty for the while, and talking with me as fellow-mortal to fellow-mortal. I very soon discovered, first, that Sergeant Speke had searched carefully enough around the house that morning to have seen the tracks if they had been there, and, secondly, that the man, Speke, as distinct from the Sergeant, knew perfectly well that they were not there.

Not till then did I summon the girl Edith from the servants' hall where she was waiting. I made her tell her tale. I saw the Sergeant take a due note of it for transmission to those, to me mysterious, headquarters where I supposed all such matters were digested. I got the assur-

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ance that Sergeant Speke was really man enough to see that his own evidence, as to the non-existence of the tracks that morning, would be noted and digested too. I dismissed the Sergeant and Edith, and went slowly to bed. Did I suspect this person? No! Did I suspect that person? N—no. At last I determined that I would not let my suspicions fasten on any one man, while it might be just as reasonable that his suspicions should fasten on me. But my mind remained full of horror and of the image of a candle-end spluttering out, while the man, who had lighted it to read by, lay dead in those bloody sheets. Very, very glad I was that my wife was at last coming home next day.

I suppose it was from the association of two female names that my dreams, when at last I slept, were of nothing more horrible than the ship *Eleanor*, which, as the reader remembers, probably still sailed the seas.

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CHAPTER VIII.

WITH some doubt as to whether it was what I ought to do, but with no doubt that it was what I wanted to do, I sought out Callaghan next morning for a final talk with him before he left; for he was at last to tear himself away from the scene which he haunted. I tried on him, I do not know why, the effects of Edith's disclosure without telling him what I now knew about the tracks. I could see that he accepted the truth of the girl's statement, and had grasped, much more quickly than I had, what it imported. It was therefore wearisome to me, and, in my then state of mind, most jarring, that for some time he persisted in playing with the idea that Trethewy might still be guilty. He supported it, as he went on, with more and more far-

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this time seriously, to several things which he told me about Thalberg, which were new to me and threw an unpleasant light upon him. Then I interposed. Thalberg had left the house with me, and it had been made all but certain that he went straight to his hotel and never left it until many hours after the murder had been discovered. In any case it was not he who had made those tracks, for he had certainly kept in his hotel from early morning on the 29th till he left. And I then told Callaghan my reason for believing that those tracks were made in the middle of the day on the 29th. "My dear friend," he exclaimed, this time with all the appearance of earnestness, "I no more really believe than you do that Thalberg actually did the deed. He is not man enough. But I have a method, I have a method. I am used to these things. I am off to Town now; I shall be there some time; you know my address. I mean," he added grandiloquently, "to work through all the outside circumstances and possibilities of the case, and narrow down

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his madness, for there was certainly some madness in his method. I took leave of him (after he had called, that afternoon, to renew acquaintance with my wife) little foreseeing what his two next steps would be. He stopped on his way to London at the county town, where he went to the county police office to communicate some information or theory about Thalberg. He went on to London, as he had said he would, but, instead of remaining there as he had said, he suddenly departed next day for the Continent, leaving no address behind.

We have now arrived at the first week in March, the several events (if I may include under the name of events the slow emergence of certain thoughts in my own mind) which prepared the way for the eventual solution of our mystery, occurred at intervals, and in an order of which my memory is not quite distinct, during that and the remaining nine months of the year.

The resolution at which I had arrived not

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on the first evening after her arrival. I was aware that she would not be able to share with me in the determination not to harbour suspicions of any particular person, but I had thought she would be averse to my taking positive steps towards the detection of the crime. She, however, was indignant at the idea that I could let things be. "Several innocent men will be under a cloud all their lives," she said, "unless the guilty man is found. There is Trethewy, I suppose they will let him out some day; but who is going to employ him? Not that uncle of his; and we cannot. Who do you suppose is going to see this through if you do not?" She was powerfully seconded in this by a neighbour of ours, now an old man, who had had much experience as a justice. "Mr. Driver," he said, "you may think this is the business of the police, but remember who the police are. They do their ordinary work excellently, but their ordinary work is to deal with ordinary crime. This was not an ordinary crime, and it was done by no ordinary man. If it is ever discovered, it will be by a man whose education gives him a wider horizon than that of professional dealers with criminals."

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I do not know how far the reader may have been inclined to suspect Callaghan (that depends, I suppose, on whether the reader has been able to form any idea of his character, and I myself had not, so far, formed any coherent idea of his character; there seemed little coherence in it), but the police certainly had begun to suspect him.

On a superficial view of the matter there was every reason to do so. Short of bolting on the night of the murder, before it was discovered, he had done all that, theoretically, a guilty man should have done. He had lost no time whatever in attempting to put suspicion on one innocent man. He had striven to intermeddle officiously in the investigations conducted by the police. There was more than one apparent lie in the information he had given. He had haunted the scene of the crime as though it fascinated him. When the first innocent man was cleared, he had at once suggested another man, who was almost certainly innocent also, and he had then, after giving false accounts of his intentions, quitted the country without leaving his address. Then he was certainly in the house when the crime was committed. His

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movements on the following day were nearly accounted for, but not so fully that he could not have made those false tracks. After all it was a circumstance of deep suspicion that he had been so quick to recognise the peculiar print of Trethewy's boot.

Alas, even to the test *cui bono*, "that stock question of Cassius, 'whom did it profit?'" Callaghan responded ill. I knew, and somewhat later in reply to an enquiry by the police, it was my duty to say, that Callaghan was in a certain sense a gainer by Peters' death. He had been a most imprudent investor (not, I believe, a speculator), and had in his embarrassment borrowed £2,000 from Peters. Peters, while living, would not have been at all hard on him if he had been honestly unable to pay, but was just the man to have made Callaghan's life a burden to him if he thought he was not doing his best to keep above water. Peters' will cancelled the debt, and it was not impossible that Callaghan knew it. But this last point illustrates the real weakness of the argument against him. Nobody could know Callaghan a little and think that either this interest in the will or any other point in this hypothetical story of his crime, how-

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ever much it might be like human nature, was in the least like him.

Here, for want of a good description of him, are a few traits of his sojourn in my parish. He was, it is true, with difficulty dragged out of a furious brawl with a gentleman from the North of Ireland who, he said, had blasphemed against the Pope. The man had not so blasphemed, and Callaghan himself was not a Roman Catholic. On the other hand, he had habitually since his arrival lain in wait for the school children to give them goodies and so forth. He assaulted and thrashed two most formidable ruffians who were maltreating a horse, and then plastered their really horrible bruises with so much blarney that they forgave, not merely him, but the horse. He had brought for Peters, with infinite pride, a contraband cargo of his native potheen, a terrible fluid; and after Peters' death he would sit up alone in that desolate house, drinking, not the potheen, which, in intended charity, he suggested that I should bestow on the poor in the workhouse, but Mrs. Travers' barley water, and writing a rather good and entirely bright and

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me sure of Callaghan's innocence. Looking at what I suppose was evidence, I had wondered whether I was not soft in this, and I brought the matter to the test of my wife's judgment. I knew that, at least at her earlier meetings with Callaghan, she had disliked him, and, out of the facts which she knew already, I made what I flattered myself was a very telling case against him. It did not disconcert me that the lady, who, when told of his flight, had trusted he would remain out of England till she went abroad, said without much interest, "What stuff," and then suddenly kindling, exclaimed, "What, Robert, are you turning against that poor man?" When I asked for the reasons why she scouted the idea of his guilt, she seemed to consider the request quite frivolous; but at last I extracted from her a sentence which expressed what I think was at the root of my own thought. "Mr. Callaghan," she said, "is violent enough to commit a murder and cunning enough to conceal anything, but I cannot imagine his violence and his cunning ever working together."

Of course we both thought of him as sane, though he was just one of those people to whose doings one constantly applies the epithet "mad".

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CHAPTER IX.

THE enquiry upon which I had now stirred myself to enter, could not be an easy one, but it should have seemed for the present to be narrowed down to a question about a single man. Perhaps it was from repugnance against consciously going about to hang a man who had sheltered under my roof, that I did not even then definitely put to myself the question of that man's guilt. By some half-conscious sequence of thought I was led to begin my search far afield. It started with the two letters which had come for Peters from Mr. Charles Bryanston, or rather first with the later letter.

I had some time before written briefly and formally to Mr. Bryanston to acquaint him with the fact of Peters' murder, but had, for a while since, thought no more of him. Now I began

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sat, with those letters in my hand, alone before the fire. I sat at my writing-table with paper before me, and made incoherent jottings with a pencil. I should be afraid to say how often and how long I did all these seemingly idle things. Till at last, in the time between tea and dinner, with the children playing in the room, I arrived at actually spelling the matter out.

"This time I will not delay my answer." "This time——" Then at other times he did delay his answer. That might have some significance when I turned to the earlier letter. "This time I will not delay my answer." It was an answer to a question in a letter just received from Peters, an answer probably by return of post. Why not delay it this time as usual? Why, of course, because the question was one which both to Peters and to Bryanston seemed important, perhaps momentous. Simple enough so far. "Longhurst did sail

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nothing momentous in that. Stop, though. It is not necessarily that. Some one need not have thought it—he may have said it to Peters, and Peters may have thought it was a lie. And what did it matter, and why did some one say it? Well, of course, Longhurst would be dead if the ship had gone down; and Longhurst was not really dead, and some one was interested in saying that he was. Perhaps Longhurst was the next heir to some property, and search ought to have been made for him; and my mind wandered over all the stories I had ever read of lost heirs, in fact or in fiction. Or perhaps—— Who said Longhurst and his ship went down? "C." said it, whoever "C." might be.

Then I took up the earlier letter. I knew from the other letter that this had been sent late. There was nothing further to be gained from the words of it, but a flood of suspicion broke upon me as I held it in my hand. Had "C." another initial to his surname, a double name? Did I know this "C"? Had I not

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read it before it was given to me? Had I not rather wondered at the pains he had kindly taken to help me with several letters before? Did he not laugh rather strangely as he read it, though I never heard him laugh at anything amusing? Did he not go away just after the letter came, though he had not been intending to go so soon? Was it conceivable that he knew that Peters had asked that question, and thought the first letter ("very uninforming," as he called it) was the answer to that question, and an answer which made him safe? After that one laugh I thought he became suddenly downcast. Had he really read in that letter that he need not have feared Peters, and that he had—yes, murdered him for nothing? Had the accident that Peters had written, perhaps long before, some unimportant question to Bryanston, and the accident that Bryanston had delayed his answer betrayed this man into leaving me alone with my letters a week too soon; and would this trifling mistake lead him to—to the gallows?

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should beware of going back upon your first instinctive impressions of liking or dislike when you happen to have them. There are qualifications to it; the repulsions that start from ugliness or strangeness or difference of opinion may not be safe guides. But broadly the maxim is true. It was true in this instance. No, I too had never liked "C."

It is strange that I should have received Mr. Bryanston's answer the very next morning, a long, full, warm-hearted letter on the death of the friend to whose letters in life—and what letters Peters wrote!—he made such scrappy replies. In a P.S. at the end, as if the writer had hesitated whether to write it, were the words: "It is curious and may be news to you that Mr. Peters, at the time he was murdered, was unravelling the mystery of another murder, committed, as he suspected, many years ago".

So then, as I had half-guessed, Longhurst was dead. It was not that he was alive and Cartwright pretended he was dead, he was dead, and Cartwright had a motive for falsely pretending he was drowned.

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CHAPTER X.

"TOUT comprendre, c'est tout pardonner," is, I do not doubt, a saying which has its truth. Nevertheless, I have generally noticed, when I have read much about murders or other great crimes, or about the social or political misdeeds which are not called crimes, that every piece of additional knowledge about the manner in which the thing was done, the inducements that led to it, the conduct that followed it, has, for me at least, set the capital act of wrong in a more hideous light. It is not, I think, that the picturesque circumstances, like the guttering candle whose image got on my nerves that night, affect me profoundly. It is, I believe, that, while many men, most if you like, are middling, the distinctly bad are really much worse and the distinctly good are really much better than the world of middling people is at

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conceived them, a great hatred of Vane-Cartwright possessed my soul. There was a passage in my subsequent course with regard to him, when a reason personal to myself had just been added to the cause of my hate, upon which I look back sometimes with self-disgust, but I cannot think that the desire, which first prompted me to fasten myself upon Vane-Cartwright and try to drag him down, was an impure desire, or that it consorted ill with the inner meaning of those precepts which it was my profession to teach.

Whether it was right or wrong, the strength of the feeling which then animated me showed itself in my resolve to think calmly and to act circumspectly. I was conscious that the structure of my theory was held together by no firm rivets of verifiable fact, but by something which must be called feeling. I did not distrust my theory on that account; but I did distrust myself, and I determined, in what lay before me, to take as few impulsive steps and to draw as few impulsive conclusions as I could.

Reflecting, next morning, on what could be done immediately to bring my hypothesis to the test of fact, I looked in the *Postal Guide*

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for such information as it gave about the mails to and from Bagdad. I also verified my impression as to the date of that occasion when Vane-Cartwright, staying at the hotel, had spent the evening with Peters. From what I found it seemed to me that a letter to Bagdad, posted that night, might have been expected to bring an answer back by the date on which the first letter from Bryanston came to my hands, or even a few days earlier, but that the delays of steamers might easily bring it about that an answer should not arrive till a week later, that is, when the second letter from Bryanston came to me. So far then there was nothing to make my conclusion impossible. I may add here that the enquiries which I made, as soon as I saw how to do it, confirmed what I gathered from the *Postal Guide*, and showed that on this occasion such a delay of the mails had actually happened.

But, assuming this about the mails, what a frail edifice my theory still remained! Upon most careful reconsideration, I saw, as the reader may see, that it fitted in easily with all the known

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science or history. But as for expecting the law to hang Vane-Cartwright upon this, I myself, fantastically no doubt, refrained a little later from black-balling him at a distinguished club, of which, oddly enough, I had in my ambitious youth become a member. In large part the case, so to call it, against him rested on my observations of his demeanour in my house, and especially of his conduct in regard to my business as executor and my letters. This was precise and cogent enough for me, the observer at first hand; but it was too much matter of general impression to be of use to any one but me. Then the attribution of that early murder to Vane-Cartwright seemed to me absolutely requisite to make his murder of Peters conceivable. But it was the work of my imagination. In the region of palpable facts, one thing alone was evidence against Vane-Cartwright and not against any other man. It will be remembered that, when Callaghan first denounced Trethewy, Vane-Cartwright said that Trethewy's behaviour in his presence to Peters had been friendly and respectful. He knew, I now told myself, a better way than expressing suspicion of Trethewy, and while by his stealthy act he fabricated evidence

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against him, he contrived by his words to cast on Callaghan alone the risk of thereafter appearing as an innocent man's traducer. But his cunning had made a slip. It was gratuitous in doing so to have uttered a refutable lie as to Trethewy's conduct in his presence. He was not the man to have seen the imprudence of this. It would have been to him inconceivable that Trethewy should confess the full extent of his wrong conduct to me. And so, not from any want of coolness, he had provided me with the one scrap of ordinary evidence necessary to give firmness to that belief of mine which might otherwise have seemed a mere bubble.

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CHAPTER XI.

By the time that my wife, who had been again obliged to be in London while I was spelling out this story, had returned, I had long come to the conclusion that my theory had enough in it to be worth submitting to her criticism. But she forestalled me with news of her own, and news which concerned Vane-Cartwright. The young lady, Miss Denison, whom he was to have married had suddenly broken off the engagement within two days of his joining her upon the Riviera. The girl could give no good reason for her conduct, and her own people loudly condemned it; they had been against the engagement, for the difference of age was too great; they were still more against the flighty breach of it; but she was obdurate

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unhappy young lady had given my wife her confidence. Far from having any suspicion about the murder, she had never even heard, when she made her decision, that there had been a murder at all; for she and her mother did not read news of that order, and Vane-Cartwright, though he had said that he had been through a dreadful experience, of which he was anxious to tell her, had not yet said what it was. There had evidently been a quite unaccountable quarrel in which the high-tempered girl had, in all things external, begun, continued and ended in the wrong; and she did not now defend herself. Somehow, she said, he was changed. No, not in his manner to her; she had not doubted his attachment to her. Only she had thought she had loved him before, and she knew now that she did not. Something, which she had seen in him before but not disliked, now jarred upon her feelings in a new way. She had been very, very foolish, very, very wrong; she could explain nothing; she was very unhappy, very angry with herself; but this she knew, and this alone she knew, that it would be wrong for her to become William Vane-Cartwright's wife.

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So much my wife told me. Then, with that precipitancy in travelling to remote conclusions which sometimes seems so perilous in able women, she said, as quietly as if it were the most obvious comment, "Robert, it was Vane-Cartwright that did the murder". Now she had never even spoken to him.

Accordingly, she received my theory of the murder almost with enthusiasm. None the less, she immediately put her finger upon the weakest part of it. "I wonder, all the same," she exclaimed, "why he murdered Eustace?" "Why," I said, "he saw in a moment that Eustace knew he was lying and suspected him of the murder." "That would not have been enough," she said; "he must be a very cool-headed man from the way he behaved after the murder, and he would never have run the risk he ran by a second murder, if there had not been much more than suspicion of the first." "Then," I suggested, "perhaps Eustace already knew it and the lie

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did not murder Eustace." Then she turned on me with a woman's promptitude and a woman's injustice: "You can always argue me down," she said, "but he did murder Eustace Peters, and you have got to find out all about it and bring him to justice. I am sure you have the ability to do it. You may have to wait, but, if you wait patiently and keep your eyes open, all sorts of things will turn up to help you. I shall be very angry with you," she added, in a tone not at all suggestive of anger, "if you do not do it."

I felt, like my wife, that it was a matter of waiting for what would turn up. In the neighbourhood of the murder there was probably very little to turn up. The police, I felt no doubt, had made all manner of enquiries; and as for anything that I was likely to pick up, I supposed I had already heard all, and more than all that any person in the neighbourhood knew about the matter. I may anticipate a little and say that in the whole of the four months, which, as

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and long ago, might be easier to trace than the recent, but perhaps more carefully veiled, crime committed to cover it. Peters, I reasoned, must have been in possession of proofs of it, and probably, as I searched his voluminous papers, something would appear to indicate the nature of those proofs. I began, as in any case I should have done, a careful reading of his papers. It took up no small part of my spare time, for I found that he had prepared little enough for immediate publication, but fuller and more valuable materials for his projected book of psychology than I should at all have expected from his manner of proceeding. But, of what now interested me more than my friend's philosophy, I found nothing in all this mass of letters and notes and journals; nothing, that is, which threw direct light on this mystery, for indeed his psychological notes and my discussions with a friend of his, an Oxford philosophy tutor, to whom I eventually committed them, did I think influence me not a little in one

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soon to the notice of the suspected man, and the great ability with which I credited him might suggest some effective scheme for baffling my search. But of course I wrote early to Mr. Bryanston to ask if he would tell me to whom he alluded as "C.," whether Longhurst was the man whom Peters suspected had been murdered, and whether I inferred rightly that "C." was involved in this suspicion.

It was my duty to put all that I knew at the disposal of the police, and the opportunity for doing so soon presented itself in the visit, which, as I have said, was paid to me to enquire about Callaghan. My visitor was an important official, since dead, whom I need not more clearly indicate. He had been a military man, and he struck me as, in some ways, admirably qualified for his post. He was, I believe, excellent in the discipline he maintained among his subordinates and in all the dispositions he made for meeting the common public requirements. I am told also that he had wonderful familiarity with the ways of ordinary law-breakers, but he did not appear to me to have much elasticity of mind. After answering fully his question about Callaghan, I thought it right to give my

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own impression of his innocence. My visitor answered me with a somewhat mysterious reference to those who really guided the conduct of the affair. He could not himself, he said, go behind their views. Then with an evident sympathy for my concern about Callaghan, he told me in confidence and still more mysteriously that the opinion of an eminent specialist had been taken.

I then ventured to press the question of Trethewy's release, and learnt that it was being carefully considered, but he could not be set free immediately. Then I told my visitor of the statement of Vane-Cartwright when Callaghan first spoke of Trethewy, and how Trethewy's confession proved this to have been a deliberate falsehood. I showed him and gave him copies of the letters of Bryanston to Peters and to me. I informed him, and at my request he noted, that Vane-Cartwright had opened the first letter. I stated what I had myself observed of Vane-Cartwright's conduct, and indicated frankly the conclusion which I was disposed to draw. It did not seem to me that I produced any impression. My visitor listened, if I may say so, with the air of a man who completely takes in the

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fact and sees that it should be put in some pigeon-hole, but is without either apprehension or wonder as to its real bearing. I gathered, on the whole, that the official mind was chiefly taken up with the theory that Callaghan was guilty; but that there was also thought to be an off-chance that something might yet turn up to repair the seemingly shattered case against Trethewy. I gathered too, and, I hope, gave due weight to the fact, that there was some likely way, of which I had before heard nothing, by which an unknown person might have entered and escaped from the house that night. One thing more I learnt; nothing suspicious had been discovered about Thalberg's movements, but it appeared, and this seemed to be considered as in his favour, that he had a great deal to do with Vane-Cartwright.

After my visitor had taken courteous leave of me, it dawned upon me what was meant by his dark sayings about Callaghan. I had wondered how the opinions of an eminent specialist in police matters could be so cogent in a case about which he knew nothing at first hand. Suddenly

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toms of insanity. The police then were not being guided by those superficial and so to speak conventional notes of guilt, of which I had thought, to the exclusion to all those sides of character which I had noted. On the contrary they had a view of their own on which these two conflicting sets of phenomena might be reconciled, a view which explained why Callaghan was to me so inexplicable. The man was not sane.

I could not conceal from myself that there was at least something plausible in this view. There is a sort of marked eccentricity and, as it were, irresponsibility of conduct of which I had always thought as something not merely different from incipient madness but very far removed from it. Yet I had once before been terribly mistaken in thinking thus about a friend, and I might, I reflected, be mistaken now. The natural effect upon me was, or should have been, a keener sense of the unsubstantial nature

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CHAPTER XII.

In the course of the summer my wife and I paid our annual visit together to London, and I had a few days in Oxford before the end of the summer term.

I heard a good deal about Vane-Cartwright in London, for he had become a man of some mark in society, and moved in a little set, which was known among its members by a rather precious name, now forgotten though celebrated in the gossip of that time, and which included a statesman or two of either party and several men of eminence in letters, law or learning. By a strange coincidence of the sort which is always happening, I met at an evening party a friend who mentioned Longhurst, and I had just heard from him something of no moment about this man whose fate so deeply exercised me, when I saw Vane-Cartwright himself stand-

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as I supposed. I have hitherto forborne to describe his appearance, because such descriptions in books seldom convey a picture to me. But I must say that seen now in a room where there were several distinguished people, he made no less impression on me than before. He was, I should say, five foot eleven in height, thin and with a slight stoop, but with the wiry look which sometimes belongs to men who were unathletic and perhaps delicate when young, but whose physical strength has developed in after years. Hair which had turned rather grey, while the soft texture and uniformly dark hue of his skin still retained a certain beauty of youth, probably accounted for a good deal of his distinction of appearance, for he was not handsome, though his forehead, if narrow, was high, and his eyes which were small were striking—of a dark greenish-grey colour, I think. The expression of the mouth and of the clear-cut and firm-set jaw was a good deal hidden by

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he smiled and showed his white teeth, his eyelashes almost completely veiled his eyes. To me, naturally, it gave him a hateful expression, yet I could see a certain fascination about it. Then he moved farther off—very quietly, but I could see as he made his way through the crowd that in reality every motion was extraordinarily quick.

Some ten minutes after, I was about to go, when he suddenly came from behind and addressed me, asking me to choose a day for dinner or luncheon at his club. I declined, and freed myself as courteously and as quickly as I could, and thought, for the moment, that there had been nothing marked in the way in which, obeying irresistible impulse, I had shaken off the man whom I suspected on such slight grounds but so rootedly.

A few days afterwards a great robbery was attempted at Vane-Cartwright's house. The robbers were after a well-chosen and valuable collection of gold ornaments of early periods or from strange countries, which he had begun to make. It was reported in the papers that the

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ill-guarded treasures. But the robbers themselves got away. The matter was much talked of, and conflicting tales were told about it, but it seems that Vane-Cartwright, hearing some unusual noise, had come downstairs and surprised the two men who had entered the house before they had succeeded in removing any of their spoil. As he came down he had rung up the police by the District Messenger Company's apparatus which was in the house. Coming quietly upon them, and standing in the dark while they were in full light, he had first ordered them to hold up their hands, and had then made each of them singly turn out his pockets and restore the smaller stolen articles which they had already secreted in them. He then, it was said, kept them standing there to await the police. But, by some ruse, they distracted his attention for a moment, and then, suddenly putting out their light, made a rush past him and escaped. Such at any rate appears to have been the information which he gave to the police who arrived soon after. The police actually arrested two men, already known to them as

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slinking away separately, and they were at first confident that they had secured the authors of the attempted robbery. But Vane-Cartwright not only could not identify the arrested men as the two housebreakers, whom he had of course seen well; he insisted firmly that they were not the men whom he had seen; nor were the right men ever caught. The matter caused some surprise, and the police were freely blamed for their bungling. I have my own reason for doubting whether they were justly blamed.

It is a mere fancy on my part that this incident and my meeting with Vane-Cartwright a few days before may have had a connexion with each other and with certain subsequent events in this history. I fear that my experience in that year and the next has made me ready to see fanciful connexions; and the reader, when he knows of those subsequent events, will see what I suspect took place upon the discovery of the theft, but will very likely think my suspicion extravagant. However that may be, Vane-Cartwright's plucky adventure and the celebrity which it helped to give to his artistic collections, caused me to hear all the more of him during my stay in London.

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Curiously, however, it was at Oxford, where he had not distinguished himself, that the fame of Vane-Cartwright was most dinned into my ears. The University is apt to be much interested in the comparatively few of her sons whose road to distinction is through commerce; and, moreover, he had lately given to the University Museum a valuable collection of East Indian weapons, fabrics, musical instruments and what not, which he had got together with much judgment. Thus it happened that I heard there one or two things about him which were of interest to me. A friend of mine, an old tutor, the Bursar of the college at which Vane-Cartwright had been, described him as he was in his undergraduate days. He had, in his opinion, been badly brought up, had never gone to school, but been trained at home by parents who were good people with peculiar views, highly scientific and possibly highly moral views. He had not fallen into either of the two common classes of undergraduates which my old friend understood and approved—the sportsmanlike and boyishly fashionable class, or the studious class who studied on the ordinary lines; still less into the

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smaller, but still not small, class which combines the merits of the two. He had attainments of his own, which the old tutor did not value sufficiently, for he was proficient in several modern languages and modern literatures; moreover, the necessary mathematics, Greek and Latin grammar, formal logic, etc., which he had to get up, gave him not the slightest trouble. Altogether he had plenty of cleverness of his own sort, but it was a sort which the Bursar thought unwholesome. He was quite well conducted, and ought to have been a gentleman, coming of the family of which he came, but somehow he was not quite a gentleman. Thus it was a great surprise to the possibly conventional instructor of his youth that he had done so well in the world.

Then I heard of him from another man, justly esteemed in financial circles, who was on a visit to his son at Oxford, and whom I met in a common-room after dinner. Somebody had hazarded the remark that Vane-Cartwright must have been either a very hard worker or a very lucky speculator. "No," said this gentleman, who was a colleague of his on the Board of one of the only two companies of which he

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was a director, "I should not say that a man like that worked hard as you would understand work at Oxford, or at least as a few of you would. His hard work was done when he was young. Most of his business is what one of his clerks could run, and probably does run, for many weeks together, on lines which he has planned very carefully and revises whenever occasion requires. Nor is he what most people would call a speculator. I fancy he very seldom takes any uncommon sort of risk, but he always does it at the right moment. He has succeeded because he is very quick in making his calculations and very bold in taking action on them. He does not seem to be constantly watching things, but when a special emergency or a special opportunity occurs he seems to grasp it instantly, and I believe he troubles himself very little, too little perhaps, about any affair of his when it is once well in train."

Lastly, I heard a story, the narrator of which could give me few precise details of the

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generosity with which he had set up these people in life though they had very little claim on him. Here at least was something which took its place in the story which I was weaving; the rest of what I had heard was little to the purpose, though it served to give life and colour to my idea of the man's character.

Now, however, I was really to discover something definite. When we returned to our home at Long Wilton, only a little before we finally left it, I completed my examination of Peters' papers. His various diaries and notebooks, notes of travel and notes of study, jottings and completed passages for his psychological book, I found to be of fascinating interest, and I lingered over them long, but there was not a hint among them all of Longhurst, the *Eleanor* or any kindred topic. One of the journals, I noticed, had had some leaves cut out. The last place of my search was a small wooden trunk which I had brought home from his house (now sold). On the top of it lay a sheet of paper with, written in his mother's hand,

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a false sense of pathos, but my eyes filled with tears, and I was indisposed to rifle callously these relics so lovingly put aside with natural hopes which now could never be fulfilled. I was about to make a bonfire of the box and all its contents, reverently but with speed, when my wife arrested me in amazement at my folly. "Why," she said, "cannot you see? His letters to his mother will be in it." "His letters from the East," she added, as I still did not comprehend. And they were in it.

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CHAPTER XIII.

I HERE set down in order of their date several extracts from Peters' letters to his mother written from Saigon in the years 1878 to 1880.

First Extract: "I have a new acquaintance, one Willie Cartwright, a young fellow who was at Oxford just after me. I spend a good deal of time with him because of talking Oxford shop and because he is fond of books; at least he was brought up among them, and reads the books he thinks he ought to read. I have not got very much in common with him, for he is a narrow-shouldered, bilious-looking, unathletic fellow, with no instinct of sport in him; but he is a welcome addition to my circle, because he is refined—in a negative way at least—and most of my friends' conversation here is—well, not refined, and it becomes a bore."

Second Extract: "How curious that you should have known some of young Cartwright's people, for it is W. V. Cartwright. I thought

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they must have lost their money since I heard of him at Oxford. Yes, I will try to 'take care of him' a little, as you say, but really, though he is quiet and not sociable among men, he is by no means a timid youth, and he has quite got the name of a shrewd business man already."

Third Extract: "I am rather sorry about Willie Cartwright. He seems to have got into the hands of a fellow named Longhurst, who has lately turned up here, no one knows why. He, Longhurst, is a rough customer whom no one seems to know anything about, except that he has been in Australia. He has been a mining engineer, and seems to know also a lot about tropical forestry. He has wonderful yarns of the discoveries he has made in the Philippines, the Dutch Indies and all over the shop. I should not believe his yarns, but he seems to have made a little money somehow. Well, Cartwright now talks of becoming a partner with him in some wild-cat venture, and I am afraid he will get let in. He says himself he thinks Longhurst will try to do him. He had much better stick to his humdrum business here, which will give him a living at any rate,

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and perhaps enable him to retire comfortably when he is, say, forty-five, young enough to enjoy life, though one does age soon in this climate."

Fourth Extract: "Cartwright and Longhurst have actually gone off together. Parker, whom Cartwright was with, is very sick about it. . . . By the way, I ought to confess I was quite wrong about Longhurst. I have seen a good deal of him since, and found him a very kind fellow, with an extraordinary simplicity about him in spite of all his varied experiences. I generally assume that when a man is spoken of as a rough diamond, the roughness is a too obvious fact, and the diamond a polite hypothesis, but I was wrong in Longhurst's case. Also I think you may reassure C.'s aunt about the chances of his being swindled. In strict confidence I think the chances are the other way. MacAndrew, the lawyer here, told me a story he had no business to tell about the agreement between . . ." (Part of letter lost.)

This was all. Peters before long was moved to Java; and the letters to his mother ceased soon after, for she died.

Not long afterwards I got Bryanston's answer

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to my letter of enquiry to him. He told me little but things of which by this time I was sure. "C." was Cartwright (William V. Cartwright, he called him), and was, he conjectured, the man whom Peters connected with Longhurst's death. He would be glad to tell me at any time anything that he could, but he was off now for a sea voyage which the state of his health made necessary (a long absence immediately before accounted for some delay in his answering me), and at present he could think of nothing to tell me but what I should see in Peters' letter to him, of which he was keeping the original and now enclosed a copy.

The important part of the letter enclosed was as follows: "I have a question to ask you which perhaps you will answer this time by return of post. Never mind my previous question about the old Assyrians. You will remember the time in 1882 when you were at Nagasaki, and you will remember Longhurst's being there and his sailing. After his disappearance it got about naturally that he sailed in

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after that, you told me that you had seen Longhurst with Cartwright at Nagasaki, that you saw them off, and that they both sailed together in the same ship. I have forgotten the name of the ship you mentioned, but it was a ship with some female name, and it belonged to your people. Will you please tell me at once if my recollection is right. As for my reason for asking, I expect I told you fully my reasons for believing that Longhurst died by some foul play. I may have told you the suspicion which I had as to who did it. It was a suspicion for which I was sorry afterwards, for I saw reason to think it quite unfounded. But I have just seen a man, whom I need not name, who must have known when and how Longhurst sailed from Nagasaki; and he astonished me by saying that he sailed in the *William the Silent*. Now one of three things: either I have got muddled in my recollection as to what you said, or, which I can hardly believe, I was mistaken in my identification of the body which I exhumed from the tomb which the chiefs showed me, or I was right in both points, and then a conclusion seems to follow which I shrink very much from drawing. There is one other matter of fact

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which I suspect and which I can easily verify, which would absolutely fix the guilt on the man I allude to, but I want to make quite sure from you that my memory is right as to Longhurst's sailing. A suspicion of my man's guilt came to me as I have said, long ago, but after making some enquiries I dismissed it summarily, for I have, or ought to have, a sort of hereditary friendship with him."

So then my hypothesis had been further put to the test of facts, and again some of the points which I had guessed had proved to be true. It was no longer only a fanciful imagination of my own, but a suspicion which any sane man with the facts before him must feel, and feel very strongly. There was more than enough evidence for any sensible historian, for a lawyer there was still none at all.

In September the time came that we were to leave Long Wilton for good. We then moved to a country parish, which, though deep in the country, is yet very near to London (and I thenceforward often came to town). Naturally

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and with arrangements which must instantly be set on foot for future work.

Before the close of the year 1896 (I think it was late in October, anyway it was some time after I had settled into my new parish), a further record of the sort for which I have been looking came to light. It was my business as executor to sell certain securities which had belonged to Peters, and for a long time there was a difficulty in finding with whom those securities were lodged. Eventually, however, they were found in the hands of the firm who had been his agents while he was absent in the East, and in sending them to me, the firm sent also a packet which they told me had been deposited with them for safe keeping in the year 1884, on the occasion of a brief visit home which Peters had made. The packet was a large envelope on which was written "Notes on the affair of L." On opening it I found first two maps drawn by Peters. The one was a rough copy of a map of the island Sulu, in the Philippines. The other a map on larger scale, very carefully drawn, apparently from Peters' own survey, of a small

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white man was shown me by the two chiefs". Next I found a number of sheets taken out of Peters' journal, kept in the year 1882 in the months of July and August. From this it appeared that Peters had at that time accompanied one Dr. Kuyper, who seemed to have been a naturalist, upon a cruise in the Philippines, and that they had come to a village upon the coast of the island, where the Filipinos informed them that a month or so before, a European, they thought an Englishman, had come down from somewhere inland, with several Malay and Chinese servants, and had requested assistance in burying the body of his companion. The dead man, he stated, had been killed by a fall from some rocks. The Filipino chiefs had told Peters that the servants, who had not been present when the fall took place, were much excited, and seemed suspicious about it, but that the manner and the answers of the European traveller had allayed their own suspicion. Some

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hand), which had led Peters to identify the body as that of his former acquaintance, Longhurst. He recorded also that they had found two bullets from a revolver in the back of the head, and he made a note as to the size and pattern of revolver which these bullets would fit. Full enquiries were made by Peters and Kuyper as to the movements of the surviving traveller, who was presumably the murderer, and he appeared to have sailed, the day after his arrival, in a Chinese junk, which took him up at a point which was indicated on the chart. Peters had recorded also the description which the Filipinos gave of this visitor, and it was plain to me that there were points in the description which tallied with the appearance of Vane-Cartwright. It seemed, though the journal after this point was fragmentary, that Peters and Kuyper proceeded immediately afterwards to Manilla, very likely to communicate their discovery to the officers of justice. There was nothing more in the journal itself which it is worth while to repeat here.

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made them. There were many abbreviations in them, and very often they were illegible. They included descriptions of a number of people with outlandish names, and particulars as to where and how it was supposed they were to be found. Unfortunately, it was just in these particulars that the abbreviations and illegibility made the difficulties of the reader most serious. There were also recorded the movements, or a great part of the movements, of a personage called "X." in the months June to September in the year 1882.

Further, on a separate sheet of paper, I found an indication of the reason why Peters had desisted from his pursuit of that person X. whom I thought myself able to identify. This sheet of paper was headed "Description given me of the convict Arkell executed at Singapore in November, 1882". The description corresponded very well with that given in the journal of the presumable murderer of Longhurst, and so far as it went it seemed to show that the convict Arkell might well have been confused with the successful and respected financier, William Vane-Cartwright. At the foot of the paper was a note, with the dates queried, as to the time when

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Arkell had been, as he seems to have been, on the island of Sulu.

There was also among these papers one which began, "These, so far as I can recollect them, are the facts told me by MacAndrew in regard to the agreements made in 1880 between X. and L." MacAndrew's story had apparently related to changes made in the draft of the agreement, at the instance of X., which MacAndrew evidently thought that L. had not understood. The note seemed to have been finished in haste and to have left out some important facts, which Peters no doubt carried in his memory. A lawyer, among my friends, tells me that without these facts it is impossible to be certain what exactly was the trick which "X." played upon "L.," and that it is even possible to suppose that there was no dishonesty at all in his proceedings.

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CHAPTER XIV.

TOWARDS the end of November, 1896, I again saw Callaghan. I had some time before ascertained that he had returned to London, and I daresay it may appear to the reader strange that I should not immediately upon his return have sought him out and again compared notes with him. But (not to mention that I had no reason, so far, to set great store upon Callaghan's observations and theories) it must be remembered that I had received a very grave warning as to his possible character. It is a serious matter for a father of a family to enter into intimate relations with a gentleman who, according to an eminent specialist, is a homicidal lunatic. So I made first a few enquiries from acquaintances of his in regard to his character and recent proceedings. For a while I intended to put off

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in the end my enquiries and my wife's absolute conviction satisfied me that the idea of his lunacy was really, as I had at first supposed, quite unfounded and foolish.

Anyway, I at last invited Callaghan to stay for a couple of days in our new home. He accepted, but for one night only. He arrived in the afternoon full of his Parisian adventures and to a less extent of his detective researches. With these, or with an adorned version of them, he entertained me for an hour or so before dinner. It seems that his sudden departure for Paris was not altogether motiveless. He had, on his arrival in London, heard by some accident of a gentleman in Paris who was a correspondent and intimate of Thalberg. He had immediately conceived the notion of scraping acquaintance with this gentleman and using him as a means of information about Thalberg, and he was further drawn towards Paris by a fancy that he would like to study French methods of criminal investigation, into which, through the

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the ambition of getting high employment in the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard. So it came to pass that his studies in the science of criminal investigation generally, occupied more of his attention from that time till our present meeting than the particular investigation which had at first fascinated him. Moreover, before he had been long in Paris he discovered, to his huge amusement, that he was himself the subject of suspicion and of close observation, and without regard to how this might affect his cherished ambition of an appointment at Scotland Yard, he entered upon, and continued during three whole months, an elaborate scheme of mystification for the French officials who were observing him, and, through them, for that very Department in which he wished to fill a high place. Nevertheless, he had pursued ingenious enquiries in regard to the (as I still thought him) unfortunate Thalberg, for which purpose he paid several flying visits to London and elsewhere. The result of these enquiries he related to me, mingling it up with the tale of his other adventures in such a manner that it was hard for me to grasp what its importance might be. I was able to see that Callaghan had

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employed quite extraordinary ingenuity and pains in picking up the facts about Thalberg which he told me, but that very ingenuity struck me as ludicrously disproportionate to the importance of the facts which he had found, or was ever likely to find along this road. Thalberg was a solicitor in the City who had been in a small way of business, till the firm of which he was now the sole surviving partner began, a good many years before, to be employed by Vane-Cartwright. Vane-Cartwright got this firm appointed solicitors to a company which was formed to take over his original venture in the East, and he still continued to employ Thalberg from time to time upon private business of his own. Thalberg's family were interested in Eastern commerce, and he had correspondence with many persons in various parts of the far East. Years before he had transacted for Vane-Cartwright a good deal of correspondence of a nature so secret as to be unknown to his clerks, and in the course of this very year he had again returned to an employment of the like kind for some one or other. It appeared that it might have been upon an errand connected with this secret correspondence that he had come down

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to Long Wilton. Callaghan was much excited about a discovery which he had made that Thalberg had in January of this year been in correspondence with a personage in Madrid, telegraphing to him in a cipher employed by the Spanish Consulate in London, of which he was able to make use through an official in that Consulate, who had since been discharged for misconduct and was now in Paris. There was more of this nature as to the mysterious proceedings of Thalberg, but I cannot well remember how much Callaghan told me on that occasion, and I must observe that I have set down what he then told me as I understand it now. I was not able to understand it completely at the time owing to the fact that throughout his talk that afternoon Callaghan did not once allude to Vane-Cartwright by his name.

I wondered then, and I wonder now, how far up to this time Callaghan suspected Vane-Cartwright. I believe that he did not like to avow to himself the full suspicion that he felt, and

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Cartwright appeared the embodiment of those characteristics of the Englishman which an Irishman knows he dislikes, but thinks that he ought to respect. So I should guess that, as long as he could, he had dutifully forced himself to believe in Vane-Cartwright as a very estimable person full of English rectitude. In any case, for all the pains he took to follow up his suspicion that Thalberg was somehow connected with the crime, I know that he had not fully seen the conclusion to which this was leading him.

When I went up to dress for dinner, I reminded my wife of certain passages in Peters' manuscripts on psychology which we had read together with very great interest. Among these was a curious paper on "Imagination, Truth-telling and Lying," in which, beginning with the paradox that the correct perception of fact depended far more on moral qualities, and truthfulness in ordinary speech far more on intellectual qualities than was generally supposed, he proceeded to describe with great wealth of illustration some of the types under which races and individual men fall, in respect of their power of getting hold of truth and of giving it out.

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Scattered through these pages were a number of remarks which came to my mind in this talk with Callaghan. With most of them I will not trouble the reader, but in one passage in particular Peters had pointed out the mistake of thinking that a man who commits glaring inaccuracies is necessarily on that account not worth listening to. Ludicrous inaccuracies, even glaring falsehoods as they may seem, spring often, he insisted, from the peculiar abundance and vivacity of the impressions which a man receives from what passes before his eyes. A person with this gift may frequently in his memory put something that he has truly noticed into a wrong connexion, or combine two scattered fragments of observation, true in themselves, into a single totally erroneous recollection of fact. But a man who gets things wrong in this way, is, said Peters, often more full of information than a more sober observer, because he has noticed far more, and after all, a very large part of what he has noticed is sure to be accurately retained. In another passage, which I am afraid I may mar by summarising it, Peters described how, with all men in some degree, but with some men in a wonderful degree, intellectual faculties are the

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servants of emotional interests, so that not only the power of inference, but even memory itself will do work at the bidding of pain or pleasure, liking or dislike, which it will not do upon a merely rational demand. Reminding my wife of this, I said I wished I knew by what test I could tell the true from the false in Callaghan's reminiscences, and by what spell I could turn the flow of those reminiscences into the channel in which they would be useful.

As we went down to dinner she whispered to me that, if Callaghan was the sort of man that I seemed to think, she would try to turn his thoughts in the useful direction; only I must let him alone for a little while. In the course of dinner, she told our guest what she had told me long before about Vane-Cartwright's engagement, and how it had been broken off, and just what the young lady had said to her. Only of course she did not go on to tell him the rash inference which she had drawn as to Vane-Cartwright's guilt. I could see that Callaghan heard her with strange emotion, but my wife speedily turned the conversation on to more

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enough, but by no means with his usual appearance of interest.

After dinner Callaghan and I retired to my study to smoke pipes. He sat for a long while silent, and I thought that he had gone to sleep, or should have thought so but for the contraction of his brows. Suddenly he sat upright in his chair. "Faith!" he exclaimed with great energy, and with the air of a man to whom a really thrilling thought has just occurred, "I know what became of those eyeglasses of mine." "What eyeglasses?" I asked, disappointed and annoyed at the triviality of what came forth as the issue of his cogitation. "Why," he said, "I once took for a short time to wearing eyeglasses. I was looking at the stars with a man one night and I found I could not count seven Pleiades. So I went to an oculist who said he would pass me for the Navy, but as I was paying him a fee I might take a prescription for a pair of double eyeglasses which I never could keep steady on my nose." "Well?" I said sulkily. "Well," he answered, "it is only that I lost them while I was staying with Peters

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My dear Mr. Driver," he said in a more serious tone, "do you really suppose that Vane-Cartwright had not possessed himself of something handy for throwing suspicion upon you, if you had turned out to be the convenient man? I might easily have been the convenient man, and in that case, the morning after the murder, my eyeglasses would have been found smashed and lying on the floor of Peters' bedroom, as if he had knocked them off in struggling with me. Only (fortunately for you and me, Mr. Driver), Trethewy was chosen as the suitable man, and accidents that we know of prevented the plot against Trethewy working as well as perhaps the plot against you or me might have worked. Well," he continued with a smile, "I have a good deal more to tell you about Mr. Thalberg, but that will keep for a bit, and we shall understand it better later. I suspect there is something different that you wanted to ask me about now."

I asked him for anything that he remembered of that evening when Vane-Cartwright had first visited Peters at Long Wilton, while Callaghan was already staying in the house. He recounted to me and to my wife, whom we called

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in, the conversation and events of that evening in great detail. An indescribable change seemed to have come over him for a time; not only was the matter which he had to relate weighty, but the man himself gave me an impression of force and character which I had not previously suspected. I repeat only so much of his narrative as was of special interest for my purpose. "After a bit," said Callaghan, "Peters and Vane-Cartwright got away on to the subject of their experiences in some Cannibal Islands, or French possessions, or I do not know where. I was not much interested, and I dozed a bit, till suddenly I was aroused and saw that there was something up. I do not know what Vane-Cartwright had said, but suddenly Peters said, 'Sailed in what?' three times as quick and three times as loud as his usual way of speaking. That was what woke me up. 'In the' —I don't remember the name, I did not quite catch it, for Vane-Cartwright was speaking very quietly, though I could see that his face was set hard and that his eyes were bright,

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quietly. Then he got up and strode slowly about the room with his hands clenched. He did not seem to notice Vane-Cartwright much, and Vane-Cartwright went on talking, in as indifferent a way as he could, about cyclones and things, the usual sort of travellers' talk, only without the lies that I should have thrown in; but he was watching Peters all the time like a cat. After a while Peters sat down again and seemed quite composed, and talked again in quite a friendly way, but it seemed to be an effort. Then he went and wrote a letter at the other end of the room, two letters rather; one I noticed was addressed to Bombay, or Beirut, or somewhere beginning with a B. Both the letters had twopenny-halfpenny stamps on them. Soon it was bedtime; but Peters was for taking his letters down to the post that they might go early in the morning, and Vane-Cartwright was very anxious to take the letters for him, as it would be very little out of his way to go down to the post. Peters thanked him in that very polite way which he had with him when he did

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rather pressingly to come too. I suppose he would have felt lonely in that man's company, for certainly he did not want to talk to me. I do not think he said more than two words to me after we parted from Vane-Cartwright, who, by the way, kept with us all the way to the post office, which was not on his way home; but, just as we were getting back, Peters said to me suddenly, 'Let me see, did I ask him to stay with me next time he came here?' 'I do not know,' said I. 'Well, good-night,' said he."

At this point I broke in upon Callaghan's story with loud regrets that Peters had written those letters with the murderer in the room, "For you know what those letters were about," I added, remembering that he did not. "I know," said he, "but he could not help it; he was an Englishman. You English always show your hand. Not because you are frank and outspoken, for you are anything but that, but because you are so proud. You know," he went on, "that I have a devout belief in the English qualities that all we Irish hear so

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acted as Peters did. I rather hope that when I had got scent of the fellow's dirty secret—whatever it was, for I have not a notion about that—I would have exploded at once and had it out with him. I daresay I should not, but, if I had not, at least I should have taken the trouble to dissemble properly." "If he had done either," I said, "he would be alive to-day, and Vane-Cartwright would not be a murderer, or at least——" "I understand you," said he.

He continued his story, and related with great detail what was done and said day by day during Vane-Cartwright's calamitous sojourn in Peters' house when he returned to stay there. He described the relations of the two men as being exactly the reverse of what they had been when he had formerly seen them together. Then Peters had been genial and friendly, Vane-Cartwright stiff and unforthcoming. Now it was very much the other way. Several times, it appeared, the conversation had got upon the subject of Peters' Eastern travels. Each time the conversation had been led thither by Vane-Cartwright in a way of which I was afterwards to have experience. Peters was in a manner compelled to enter into it and com-

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pelled to yield information which Callaghan at the moment had thought utterly trivial, but which he now saw clearly Vane-Cartwright was anxious to possess. The information which was extracted seems to have related to all the places that Peters had visited in the East, and all the people whom he had ever met, and Callaghan remembered, or fancied, that several times, while he was being thus drawn out, Peters showed curious irritation. It appeared most strikingly from Callaghan's recital that Vane-Cartwright had throughout shown the coolest readiness to talk about the scene of his crime, if he had committed one, and to take Peters' recollection back to the old days of his association with Longhurst.

But now I must explain that through all that Callaghan told me, ran the same strain of odd and fantastic inaccuracy to which I have more than once alluded. Several times, for example, he said that I was present at conversations at which I certainly was not present. He repeated to me remarks of my own, which, if I ever said anything like them, were made on a totally different occasion from that of which he spoke. One of those remarks had

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really been made within three hours of the time when he repeated it to me, and could not have been made previously. This is perhaps the best example that I can give of what caused me a most exasperating sense of disappointment. Disappointment because, where I could not check him, Callaghan seemed to be supplying me, in the greatest fulness and in the most credible manner, with just the information that I desired; but where I could check him, though he was now and then curiously accurate in his recollection of circumstances well known to me, which I had not thought he could have observed, it still more often happened that he was under some grotesque mistake.

Worst of all, he gave me new details about the fatal night, which, if they could have been trusted, would have had greater weight than any other piece of evidence that had yet come to me, but they were just of the sort in which he was likely to be mistaken. Speaking of the moment at which he was called out from his room by the disturbance in the street, he declared that knocking immediately at Vane-Cartwright's door he heard, as Vane-Cartwright answered from the far corner of the room, a click

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which he was certain came from the lock of the despatch-box which he had mentioned. He conjectured that among various articles which were there for a dark purpose, the knife which was the instrument of Peters' death lay in that box, and that he had interrupted Vane-Cartwright in the act of taking it forth. This of course was mere conjecture, but what followed seemed at first evidence enough to have hanged the criminal. He had opened Vane-Cartwright's door, and he now described to me almost every object that was in the room as he entered it. Amongst others there lay upon the chest of drawers George Borrow's *Bible in Spain* in a binding which he described. Curiously enough he did not know the significance of this; he had, as he told me, been so much overwhelmed with grief when the murder was discovered that he had hardly begun to see or think distinctly till after we had all left the room of death; but as the reader may remember, this was the very book (and it was bound in the same way) which was found in that room dropped from the dead man's hand with torn and crumpled leaves. Who but Vane-Cartwright could have brought it there?

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It was one of Peters' oddities, well known to me (and perhaps Vane-Cartwright had learnt it long ago at Saigon), that he would have welcomed at any strange hour the incursion of a friend to talk about anything. No doubt, I thought, Vane-Cartwright entered his room on the pretext of showing him a passage which bore on something he had said. Probably between the leaves of the *Bible in Spain* he carried something that looked like a paper-knife. Anyway here was proof that after the hour at which any of us saw Peters alive, after Vane-Cartwright, by his own account, had last seen him, that man entered Peters' room. "But," I exclaimed, as all this ran through my mind, "you spoke just now of the day when I was riding at Long Wilton, whereas I was on a horse to-day for the first time for four years. Ten times at least I have known you put things out of time or out of place just like that, by way of giving colour to your story. How do I know that you have not done so now, that you did not really see that book in Vane-Cartwright's room any one of the other times that you went there, that it had not been back in Peters' library and been brought up again by Peters himself?"

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To my surprise Callaghan answered most humbly. He was quite aware, he said, of this evil trick of his mind; he had had it from a boy, and his parents ought to have flogged it out of him. As to the particular point on which I challenged him, he could not himself be quite sure.

During the remainder of his stay with me I gave him an outline of what I had so far discovered, and we compared notes upon it, but he was not long with me, as he had an important engagement next evening, and our conference was not so full as it should have been. So it easily happened that neither of us gained the enlightenment which he might have gained if our talk had been fuller. But I must confess that I fell into the fault which he called English. My disclosure was more incomplete than it need have been; I had not quite got over my instinctive wish to keep him at arm's length, and my pride rebelled a little at the discovery that this erratic Irishman was not a man whom I could afford to patronise.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE chapter which I am about to write may well prove dreary. It will be nothing but a record of two deaths and of much discouragement. Here was I with my theory (for it had been no more) grown into a fairly connected history which so appealed at many points to a rational judgment as to leave little room for doubt of its truth. And yet, as I could not but see, there was very little in it at present which could form even a part of the evidence necessary to convict Vane-Cartwright in a Court of Law. I determined all the same to get advice upon the matter from a lawyer, who was my friend, thinking that it was now time to put my materials in the hands of the authorities charged with the detection of crime, and that, with this to start upon, and with the skill

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tion that Vane-Cartwright was guilty of two murders, doubted whether the facts which I had got together would move the authorities to take up the matter actively. Still he undertook, with my approval, to talk about the subject with some one in the Public Prosecutor's office or in the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, I do not know which. Nothing resulted from this, and the failure needs little explanation. Some want of touch between town and country police, some want of eagerness on the part of a skilled official who had lately incurred blame and disappointment through the ludicrous failure of a keen pursuit upon a somewhat similar trail, these might account for it all. But besides, Callaghan had been beforehand with us, and on this occasion had managed to raise a spirit of incredulity about it all. Perhaps too even hardened experts recoiled instinctively from associating with guilt one of the few great men of finance who were

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happened just about this time that he became keenly enamoured of an invention, made by an engineer friend of his, through which he persuaded himself that he could make his own and his friend's fortune. Henceforward for some time the affair of Peters seems to have passed from his mind, and he was prevented from meeting me at the few times at which I should have been able to see him.

In the course of December I had a letter from my old parish from a friend who was kind enough to keep me posted in the gossip of the place. He said that the police were now busy over a new clue as to the murder. It may be remembered that according to Trethewy he had, as he returned home on the night of the murder, been passed in the lane by a man riding a horse and leading another. Well, report said now that a man in a neighbouring parish, who had been greatly excited about the murder at the time, had been having dreams about it night after night, which impressed him with the notion that he was to discover the truth. Rooting about for all the recollections of that time which he could find among his neighbours, he heard that in the early morning after the murder a

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man with two horses had been seen between Peters' house and the village, that another man, a stranger to the village, had come up from the direction of Peters' house and had mounted the second horse, and that the two had ridden off together. Report added that the man whom Trethewy had seen had now been traced by the police, and that his answers as to the man who had joined him and ridden off with him were unsatisfactory and suspicious; and it added one more telling detail. The police (as I may have mentioned) had before I left Long Wilton noticed one window at the back of the house as in some respects the readiest way by which the house could have been wrongfully entered. It belonged to a housemaid's closet, of which the door did not shut properly. It was very easy to climb up to it; but then the window itself was very small, and it was a question whether a man of ordinary stature could possibly have squeezed himself through it; now the strange man of this rumour was described as being ridiculously small and thin. There were many more picturesque details related, but the whole story professed only to consist of unsifted rumour. I believed little of it, but I naturally

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did accept the statement (quite mistaken) that the police were busy in the matter. With my fixed idea about Vane-Cartwright, I felt sure that they were upon a false scent. But I thought it very likely that this would for the present absorb their attention, and, between this and the great pressure of work in a new parish and of certain family anxieties, I made no further effort at this time to secure attention to the discovery which I believed I had made.

Twice in the few days just before Christmas my hopes of making further discoveries were vainly aroused. I made a call of civility in my new parish upon a notable Nonconformist parishioner, and, in my rapid survey of his sitting-room before he came to me, I noticed several indications that he had been in Australia, and I saw on the mantelpiece a framed photograph. It was rather a hazy and faded photograph which gave me no clear impression of its subject, but under it was written, "Walter Longhurst, Melbourne, 3rd April, 1875". Could that be my Longhurst, and was this one of those relations of his, whom, as I had heard, Vane-Cartwright had treated with suspicious generosity? Might he not, in that case, be the

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possessor of information more valuable than he knew? He now came in. He was a truly venerable man, who in spite of great age was still active as a lay-preacher of one of the Methodist Churches, and I was attracted by the archaic but evidently sincere piety of his greeting when he entered the room. But unfortunately, when by adjusting his gold spectacles he had discovered of what profession I was, a cloud of suspicion seemed to arise in his mind, and he was more anxious to testify, in all charity but with all plain dealing, concerning priestly pretensions and concerning that educational policy which was then beginning to gather strength, than to enter into any such conversation as I desired. I made out, nevertheless, that this Walter Longhurst was probably my Longhurst, and my expectation rose unreasonably. My new friend (if he will let me call him so) was no relation of his, but had known him at a time when both were in Australia. Longhurst was from his point of view outside the fold besides being a rough kind of man, or, as

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given money, which he could then ill afford, though he made a good deal of money later, to help religious work with which my lay-preaching friend was connected. Later on, when my informant had returned to England and was for some time incapacitated by an accident which happened on the voyage, Longhurst, to his surprise, had from time to time sent him presents of money. They came in the form of bank-notes, sent by a mysterious agent in London, who gave no address to which they could be returned, but who wrote stating Longhurst's desire that he should use them for himself, or, if he absolutely would not, should at least use them in his work. All this the old man's gratitude obliged him to relate, but, when I pressed him for information about Longhurst's relations or friends, either he knew nothing or his ill-defined suspicion of me returned and shut his mouth. I did, however, ascertain that some years before (after Longhurst's death) a rich gentleman, whose name the old man had forgotten, though I thought I could supply it, had heard of him in some way as one of Longhurst's beneficiaries, and pressed upon him a pension which he had refused, as he would, if he could, have refused Longhurst's bounty.

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Two days later, on Christmas Eve, I was urgently summoned to visit Peters' aunt, Miss Waterston, whom I had seen at his funeral. I had called upon her in the summer at her flat in London, but a lady who was staying with her remained in the room all the time, in spite, as I thought, of several hints that she might go, and Miss Waterston, when I left, said how glad she would be to see me again, and, she hoped, talk with me more fully. I took little note of this at the time, but I made up my mind to take my wife to see the old lady when I could, and continued thinking of it and putting it off till I got this summons, which told me that Miss Waterston was very ill and had something which she much wished to tell me. When I arrived at her flat she was dead. The lady who had been looking after her told me that she had several times shown anxiety that I should come soon, but had at last remarked that if I did not come in time she would accept it as a sign that what she had meant to tell me was best untold. She had two weeks before, when she was not yet ill, remarked that she would like to see me soon. Various straws of things that were told me about her suggested

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that she had lately become concerned afresh about her nephew's death. She had been intimate with the Cartwright family, and had to the end seen something of a rather neglected widowed cousin of William Vane-Cartwright's. Of course I have no ground for thinking that she had any grave disclosure to make to me.

Christmas, that year, came sadly to me. We must in any case have been full of memories of the last Christmas, at which Peters had joined our party and added much to the children's and our own delight. This Christmas he was dead; the hope, not perhaps consonant with Christmas thoughts, of avenging him had arisen in my mind and was dying, and I came home from the deathbed of the last remaining person of his kin who had loved him better than we did, and who in the little I had seen of her had reflected to me some indefinable trace of the same noble qualities as I discovered in him.

I attended her funeral. So did the old cousin who had come with her to Peters'

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met at my house. He looked to me older; his grey hair was turning auburn; he was as unattractive to me as the rest of the appanage of funerals, but I was grateful to him for being one of the very few who came to honour the remains of the old woman, almost a stranger to me, whom I yet so truly respected.

By the time the anniversary of Peters' death came round I was again alone; it had been necessary after Christmas that my daughter should go South, and my wife had taken her. I was busy and therefore happy enough, and I did not often but I did sometimes ask myself, would nothing more ever turn up? Yes, before long something did turn up; something not to help me on but to show me that, in thinking ever to unravel the dark history of Longhurst's fate, I had started upon a hopeless task. Early in February a letter came to me re-directed to Peters from the dead letter office at Siena, where it had long lain entombed. It was a letter written by Peters to a certain Reverend James Verschoyle, D.D., addressing him as a person Peters well knew and had seen quite lately. It bore the date of Vane-Cartwright's first evening at Grenvile Combe. It reminded him of a conversation which he had had with

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Peters, at their last meeting, about a very mysterious event in the Philippines, and of the great surprise which Peters had expressed at what Verschoyle then told him. "To tell the truth," said Peters, "it should have revived a suspicion which I had long ago entertained against a man who was once my friend. Or rather, it should have done more than that, it should have convinced me of his guilt and given me the means of proving it. How I came to put it from my mind I hardly know. I think that my recollection of what you told me is precise, but I should be greatly obliged if you would refer to your journals of the months May to October, 1882, and perhaps you will oblige me by copying out for me all that has any bearing on this matter. I am sorry to trouble you, but I am convinced that the ends of justice may be served by your doing this for me, and I suspect that if they are to be served, I must act as quickly as I may."

I lost no time in tracing the Rev. James Verschoyle, D.D., who had about a year before been at Siena. He had, after a sojourn in Ger-

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trace him to his latest address, only to find that he had died in the previous August. I had an interview with some of his family, and found them most obligingly willing to search for the journals in question. It was strange that the journals for the years 1881 to 1883 could nowhere be found. I was convinced that they had contained those crucial facts to which Peters had referred in his letter to Bryanston.

Evidently there had been information in Dr. Verschoyle's possession which in Peters' hands could have led to the conviction of Vane-Cartwright. Evidently Peters had once seen that information, but had disregarded it, more or less wilfully, in his determination to think his old acquaintance innocent, and to put the guilt on Arkell who had been hanged at Singapore. Evidently the full significance of Verschoyle's facts came to his mind when Vane-Cartwright, that evening at Grenvile Combe, had revived his first suspicion, and he wrote at once to recover the precise details. But of what nature

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CHAPTER XVI.

So then the mystery of Longhurst's fate was not for me to unravel. Peters had held the clue of it, and had died because he held it; Verschoyle perhaps had the clue and was dead too, probably from some other cause; neither had recorded his secret, or the record could not be found. As for the manner of Peters' death, what further place was there to look to for some fresh discovery? I already had heard all that any of my old parishioners, any grown man or woman among them, knew, and it was less than I knew, and I had searched the neighbourhood for news, quietly, but I hoped no less effectively; the police, I was now ready to believe, had searched as zealously and more wisely. And so Vane-Cartwright was to go unhanged, and why not, after all? he was not a homicidal

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likely to be more harmfully spent than those of many a better man. And no innocent man suffered under suspicion. Trethewy had been found a good place by some unlooked-for benefactor, where no memory of the crime would pursue him. Callaghan's numerous enough friends understood him far too well to suspect him, and as for his numerous acquaintances who were not friends, if they did suspect him, the good man would be rather amused than otherwise. Let Vane-Cartwright live and adorn society which is adorned by men and women worse than he, to whom circumstances have never brought the opportunity of dramatic wrong-doing.

Thus I tried to think, as I left England for a few weeks in the late spring of 1897 to join my wife and our daughter, who was now much stronger, in Italy; but, whatever I tried to think, I had always with me that consciousness of a purpose frustrated or let go, which is perhaps the hardest thing to bear well and the most enervating thing to bear ill.

Some ten days later I was in Florence with my wife. The next day we were to go to Rome, leaving our daughter at the villa of a

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friend in Fiesole. I remember at our early breakfast telling my wife the facts or reports which I had been picking up about that strangely powerful secret organisation, the Mafia. I repeated to her what I had just heard, that not only prominent Italian politicians, but even foreigners who had large commercial dealings with Italy, sometimes found it convenient to be on good terms with that society. But she was little interested in political facts which did not connect themselves with any particular personality, and I thought she had hardly heard me, though she raised her eyes to listen from the volume of Senator Villari's *Savonarola* which she was finishing. I little imagined that before another day had closed this chance remark of mine would have acquired the closest personal interest for her, and have been turned to very practical account.

Later in the day she was in the Pitti Galleries, and I came there from Cook's office to join her. She was looking with puzzled interest at a picture by Botticelli, when a tall man, dressed

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it. She turned away and met me, and was saying, half-amused, that after all there were Englishmen who could be as rude as any foreigner, when, looking at him again as he moved away to leave the gallery, she started and said: "Oh, Robert, I know his face". I too knew his face, and knew, as she did not, his name. "It is that dreadful man that I told you about who was at Crema. Do not you remember I told you how he would keep the only good room at the hotel when I arrived there with mother so terribly ill, the time she had that first stroke. And oh, I took such pains to write him the nicest note I could"—and very nice her notes could be—"and I could just see his horrid face as he glanced at it and said nothing but 'tell the lady I cannot' to the waiter. And oh, poor mother did suffer in the dreadful hot room with all the kitchen noises and the smells." I did remember her story well, an ordinary story enough, of one of those neglects of courtesy which, once in

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would feel an unreasonable relenting towards Vane-Cartwright, if once she realised that she herself owed him a grudge. Really I did not tell her because I had promptly formed a design which she would have discovered and disapproved.

That evening I left my wife on some pretext, and having discovered Vane-Cartwright's hotel, I paid him a friendly call. I suppose it was dishonourable; at least, I have often reproached myself for it, but truly I do not know if it was really dishonourable. I do know that I was very foolish to dream, as I did, that I should ferret something out of him. He received me in his private sitting-room with cordiality, or, I should rather say, effusiveness. He sent a rather urgent message to his friend who was travelling with him, as if (I thought) he did not wish to be alone with me, but he was far from embarrassed. "Tell me, Mr. Driver," he began, as soon as we were seated, "has anything further been heard about the murder of our friend Peters?" I answered that Trethewy had been released and had left the neighbourhood, having found a situation, through some friends unknown to me, and that to the best of

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my belief, the police had discovered no further clue. "I am glad about Trethewy," he said. "You know I always suspected there had been some mistake there, and besides, I always liked the man. I do not think the police will discover a clue," he said, "I rather think that the solution of the mystery will occur to some of us, his friends, if a solution ever is found." I was silent. I could not tell whether he had a design to allay possible suspicions of mine, or a design to goad me into betraying whether I had those suspicions, or whether he was merely keeping himself in practice. I wanted to drop the subject if I could. "Do you know," he persisted, "whether they have found any other way in which the house could be entered from outside except the window of his room, by which I don't believe the murderer did enter?" I said there was a small window to a housemaid's closet which was not fastened, and that the housemaid could not be quite certain that the

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Peters?" I was beginning to lose my head, for I felt I was playing an unworthy part. "Well," I said, with no particular purpose, "it seems certain that it cannot have been Mr. Thalberg." "Certain, I should say," he answered. "Oh, no," he added, more energetically, "I know Thalberg well, and he is not the man. As for Callaghan, one might as well suspect you or me—me, I should say," and he turned away to fetch a cigar, or perhaps to watch me for a moment in the mirror. "The fact is," he said returning, "it must be far easier than we, who have never had occasion to give our wits to it, think to commit a murder and hide one's tracks absolutely. But here is Mr. Poile, let me introduce you, and let us, for Heaven's sake, talk of a more cheerful subject." So we did turn to a subject which I should have thought had no pitfalls, the subject of Italian brocades, of which Vane-Cartwright was an amateur. He produced a large parcel of ancient and gorgeous stuffs which had come up on approval from a shop. He talked, in a way that really held all my interest for the time, about the patterns; and, starting from the more conventional of the designs before us, he pro-

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ceeded to discuss the history of common patterns, telling me curious things about the patterns and the fabrics of the Eastern Archipelago and the Malay Peninsula. Suddenly he picked up a really noble piece of brocade, and turning to me, with a face of winning simplicity and kindliness which he could not have learnt to assume if it had not at some time been natural, he said: "Oh, Mr. Driver, I am so fond of picking up these things, and it is so hard to find any satisfactory use for them, it would be a real kindness if you would accept this as an altar-cloth for your church. It will be wasted in a museum otherwise." It was too much for me. The proposition that I should accept an altar-cloth for my church from the man that I was seeking to convict of murder, sent a visible shudder through my frame, and all the more because I felt that it was illogical to recoil from this when I had not recoiled from affecting friendship to him. I said "No" quite violently, and, when I collected my wits to utter thanks and explanations, they were at once too effusive and too lame to have blinded a stupider man than Vane-Cartwright.

I stayed long with him—should have outstayed my welcome, if I had ever been welcome

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—for I was demoralised, and had resolved in mere dull obstinacy both to disarm his suspicions somehow and to get something out of him. The first would have been impossible for any one, the second was impossible for me then, and at last I took leave, praying him not to come down with me, and descended the stairs a very miserable man. I had behaved stupidly, that was certain. I had behaved badly, that was possible. I had shown him that I suspected him, that was certain. I ought to have known beforehand that he would guess it, for my refusal to visit him in London (as I happened to have promised I would, before he left Long Wilton) had been marked enough to set him thinking. Had I done nothing worse than betray vague suspicions? Yes, in my floundering efforts I had recurred to his Eastern patterns, and so led him to Eastern travels and towards topics dangerous to him, only to fall into my own trap. He must have seen that I had somehow heard before, as not one Englishman in twenty thousand has heard, of the little island of Sulu.

Wholly sick with myself I stood in the hall of the hotel, absently watching the porter set out the newly arrived letters in little heaps on

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a table. There was one for Vane-Cartwright. Had I not noticed that handwriting before? Yes, it was a marked hand, one so obviously that of a servant and yet so well-formed and with such an elegance. I gazed at the handwriting (somehow I thought of Sunday schools). I had just time to note the postmark before another letter covered it.

The corner of my eye had half-caught a vision of some one coming downstairs, coming very quietly but very quickly. A light step on the rug beside me, an unpleasantly gentle hand taking my arm, the fingers, I half-fancied, seeming to take measure of the size and hardness of my muscle, and Vane-Cartwright's too cultivated voice saying lightly, "Looking to see if there is any one else that you know coming to the hotel, Mr. Driver? I always do that. Well, good-night again, and so many thanks." "Caught again," I reflected, as I turned into the street and nothing gained by

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One question alone occupied me as I walked back: What was the exact significance of the almost certain fact that the situation which the Trethewys had obtained was really in Vane-Cartwright's service? Had I learnt that fact a day sooner, I might have thought that, murderer or not, he had done a true and unobtrusive kindness in secretly engaging them, but the little scene in the Pitti, and the trivial story of the best bedroom at Crema, shut that explanation out of my mind. I had not resolved this question when I got to the hotel and to my wife, who was now anxiously expecting me. I had not even thought of the other questions, to which it led, but I had at least returned in far too sensible a mood to think any further of disguising anything from her. Our talk lasted well into the night. I record so much of the substance of its close as really concerns my story. "But still I do not see," I said, "why you should say I have spoilt our holiday." "Because you must go by the first train to-morrow. Not a moment later. Oh, Robert, cannot you see why I have been so angry? I have looked forward so to our stay alone together at Rome, and at

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another time I should be very angry to lose it; but it is not that. Oh, Robert, I could find it in my heart to beg you not to do your duty. It is your duty; you would not be so full of passion against the man if it was not that you knew it was your duty; and I know it too, and you must follow up that clue at once before he makes it too late. But, oh, what am I saying, it is not your duty I am thinking of. I would beg you to let the duty be if that would save you. But it is too late now; it's a race for life between you and him. Peters has been killed, and Verschoyle has been killed, and oh!"

The thought was not in the least new to me except so far as it concerned Verschoyle. I had foreseen a time when my life would be in danger from Vane-Cartwright. Stupid as it may seem, I had not realised yet that that time was now, and anyway I had resolved to treat it lightly myself, and hoped that it might not occur to her. We spent a while without words. Then I said, in the foolish persuasion that it was a manly utterance: "I do not think that I am brave, but somehow the idea of being murdered, even if I put the likelihood of it far higher than I do, is not one which, apart from the thought

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of you, would weigh much with me". Whatever I may have been going to add, I was allowed to go no further. I was made to see in a minute that the risk to my life was a real consideration which it was selfish and, in a man of normal courage, very cheap to overlook; but anyway, the need for haste was real, and, after a very short rest, I was to start. To get ahead of Vane-Cartwright, who would probably look out for my departure, I had resolved to take horses and carriage in the early morning, post to Prato, and take the railway there. My wife was to go with our daughter to our friend's villa. So the next morning found me on my way to England, sad to go, and yet, I must confess, not a little exhilarated, against all reason, by the sense that perhaps it really was a race for life on which I had started, and a race with a formidable competitor.

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CHAPTER XVII.

CRONDALL is a small market town on a chalk stream in a Southern county, and about two miles from it down the valley lies the shooting- and fishing-box which Vane-Cartwright, as I found, had lately taken, with a very considerable shooting in the well-wooded hills, which lay behind it reaching up to the chalk downs, and with a mile or so of fishing in the trout-stream which passed through the garden. People shoot because it is the thing to do, but as a rule they do not hunt or fish unless they like it. So it was for the shooting that Vane-Cartwright had taken this place, a very charming place for a bachelor, and within easy reach of town. Trethewy, however, had been engaged as a sort of water-bailiff and to look after the fishing, which he was more or less competent to do. I found him installed in a queer old thatched cottage which stood on an island, formed by two branches of the stream, at the

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lower end of the garden. The cottage could be approached by a narrow footbridge from a private footpath which led from Crondall. On the other side of the stream a public footpath led towards the small village and the once famous fishing inn, at which I took up my quarters for a few nights. The bridge just mentioned was formed by two narrow brick arches, and above them were hatches which were now raised; and just below the bridge the stream was spanned by one of the old-fashioned fish-houses which are occasionally found on South-country streams, under the floor of which were large eel traps in which eels migrating down stream were caught. Under the fish-house, which was entered from Trethewy's cottage, the stream rushed in two pent-up channels which joined again in a broad, reed-fringed pool, with a deep dark hole immediately below the fish-house. My eye fastened on this pool at once as the best morning bath which had been offered me for some years.

Why was Trethewy there? Was Trethewy

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planation, though in some ways it looked the most plausible. It followed that one or more of the family was, to the knowledge of Vane-Cartwright, in possession of information which, if it came out, would establish Vane-Cartwright's guilt. It did not follow that any of them had guilty knowledge; probably they were not aware of the significance of what they knew. Which of them held this dark secret, and how was I to elicit it?

In the call just after their tea-time, which I lost no time in paying, I found that each of the family was for a different reason hard to approach on the topic on which I was so impatient to enter. I was welcomed respectfully and cordially enough, but they were evidently puzzled and surprised at my visit. I tried Trethewy first. He struck me as much improved by his season of adversity, by the more active life he now led, or by the rigid abstinence to which, as I soon gathered, he had brought himself; but he told me quite firmly he never spoke, never wished to speak of the question of Peters' death. He had himself suffered the horror of being accused when he was innocent; he wished to run no risk of bringing the same

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on some other possibly innocent man. Besides, the guilt of his own thought and motives still weighed on him, and he had no wish to judge any other. Nevertheless, he said plainly, when I asked how he liked his new position, that he was ill at ease to have come and hoped soon to get away. From his impenetrable manner, I began to fancy that, contrary to what I had at first thought, the secret rested with him, and in that case the secret would be very difficult to extract. As for Mrs. Trethewy, from the time of the murder two thoughts had mainly occupied her mind: anxiety for her husband, and anxiety that her daughter, for whose upbringing she was so careful, should know nothing of the suspicion that had rested on her father, and hear as little as possible of the horror that had occurred so near her. The girl had been bundled away, the very day after the discovery, to stay with Mrs. Trethewy's mother, who lived thirty miles away from their home. And to this day, the mother told me, the girl had no idea that her father had been in prison charged with the crime. Accordingly, Mrs. Trethewy

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far away. She told me that he had always seemed to take a fancy to her husband, and had visited their cottage several times during his stay with Peters; and that it was after a talk with him that she sent the girl away to her grandmother's. That the suggestion had actually come from him she did not say, it was a mere guess of mine that he had contrived to put it into her head. With the girl, whom she sent on an errand to Crondall, I got no opportunity of talk that night, and I had to return to my inn ill-satisfied with my exploration so far, and puzzled how to proceed.

I got my bathe next morning in the pool of which I have spoken (this is not quite so unimportant as it may seem). Trethewy managed to ensure me privacy for the purpose, and after that I called on the Trethewy family again. I have remarked already that I supposed myself to have heard all that any grown-up person in my old parish could tell in regard to the murder and its surrounding circumstances. It had been borne on my mind strongly since my meeting with Vane-Cartwright at Florence, that others besides adults have eyes and memories, that Trethewy's girl had been near the house at the

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time of the murder and on the following day, and that I could not count on having heard from her parents all that she might have to say that might be interesting to me. When I called on the Trethewys again, I found it an easy matter to get a walk by the river-side alone with the girl. I had anticipated that, if I were to pay any decent regard to her mother's hitherto successful wishes for her ignorance, I might have to talk long and roundabout before I could elicit what I wanted. I soon found that it was not so. Ellen Trethewy, though little taller than before, had mentally grown in those fifteen months from a shy and uninteresting school-girl to a shy but alert, quick-witted and, as it now struck me, rather interesting young woman.

We had many things belonging to old times to talk over, but I found her anxious herself to talk on the very subject on which I was bent, and I found in a moment that her mother's precautions had been absolutely vain. Knowing her mother's wish, she had never alluded to the matter since; but her grandmother, who disliked Trethewy, had taken a keen pleasure in acquainting her with all that she herself knew (and a good deal more besides) about the

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course of the proceedings against him. The girl, not quite trusting her grandmother, had procured and carefully read the newspaper account of the trial before the magistrates. She had never doubted for one instant, she told me, that her father was innocent, and it was with more than common understanding that she studied the details in the story which might make his innocence clear. "Is it very wicked of me, Mr. Driver?" she said, "that I do not feel a bit, not a bit grateful to Mr. Vane-Cartwright, and I do not believe father does. I do believe he would have gone to the workhouse rather, if he had known it when we came here that he was to be under Mr. Vane-Cartwright. But he thought the gentleman who sent for us, and who was really his agent, was the master of the place; and, once we were here, mother begged him so not to go. Mother is always saying how good Mr. Cartwright has been to us, and father never answers a word; but I am sure he has a plan to take us away somewhere far off." "Tell me," I said, "what makes you say all this. Have you seen anything in Mr. Vane-Cartwright to make you think he had some wrong reason for getting your father to come here?"

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"Oh, I do not say that," she said, "but I have always feared his looks. Always, I think, since he first came to our house to talk to father, and much more since I saw him at the window that dreadful morning when poor Mr. Peters lay dead." "Why, what could you see that morning?" I said. "Oh, very little," she said. "You see, of course we heard the news as Edith passed by on her way to call the police, and mother told me to keep within doors, and she kept in herself, and then she went to father and woke him, and she stayed there talking to him, and I was alone and I felt so frightened. And then the policeman came, and you, sir, and the doctor; and by-and-by some neighbours came looking in. One of them was Mrs. Trimmer who kept the baker's shop, and I was fond of her, and I do not know whether it was that I was frightened to be alone, or just inquisitiveness, for I was a child then, though it is not so long ago, but, though I never disobeyed mother before, I did so that time; and I went out, and Mrs. Trimmer took my hand and we walked up and looked at the house. It was not much we saw, for all we

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ing so sad, poor man, and then he took a turn or two up and down in the hall, leaving the door open; and then we could hear voices, and the rest of you came downstairs and into the hall, but I could see Mr. Vane-Cartwright come to the window of Mr. Peters' room, and he stood there looking out of the window with his hand leaning on the sash of the window, leaning forward, seeming to be looking out intently at the people below." "Did he open the latch of the window?" I asked at once. "I couldn't say that," said she. "Why were you so frightened?" I asked. "Oh, I do not know," said she; "he didn't look anything very terrible, and I couldn't see him well for there was frost on the window, but I knew him by his black moustache."

I suppose every one of my readers has been guilty of mislaying some little article of importance and looking for it everywhere but in the right place, which always turns out to have been the most obvious place of all. Perhaps I may be forgiven for having all these fifteen months been doing something analogous. I had not only overlooked Trethewy's daughter; I knew when I spoke to Sergeant Speke about those tracks in the snow that there was something

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more I had meant to ask him and had forgotten; and often since I had been dimly conscious of something forgotten. That something was the window-latch. The girl could not tell me about it, but at least it might be possible to prove by others, who had been in the room, that none but Vane-Cartwright unlatched that window.

I make this obvious reflexion now because I made it then, and in making it wasted a moment of possible talk with the girl, a trifling waste which was near to having momentous consequences. Of course it was not because the girl had been standing then on the lawn that Vane-Cartwright had taken the step, when every unnecessary step involved risk, of wiling the Trethewys away in this secret manner. He knew she had something more to tell; she was about to tell it me. "I hardly know," she broke in on my silence, "whether I ought to think as I do, but I would like to tell you what——" "Well, Ellen!" said, in cheerful tones, a voice that was somehow not cheerful, "taking a walk—who is the happy?—why, it is Mr. Driver. I did not expect the good luck of meeting you again so soon." Where was I staying, What good chance brought me there,

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and Really I must move my luggage instantly to his house, and so forth, from the last man in the world whose company I desired at that moment.

I got off staying with him. I got off, I know not on what excuse, true or false, an afternoon's fishing and a pressingly urged dinner. But then (for an idea struck me) I would, if I had finished the sermon I was writing for a Saint's day service (not in the calendar, I fear) at a neighbouring church to-morrow, stroll over to Vane-Cartwright's after my supper if he was in any case going to be in. He would in any case be in, and delighted to see me. He would be in from seven onwards. He dined at 7.30, and if I thought better of it would be delighted to see me then, and I must not dress. For the present, as Ellen had to go home, might he not show me the short way to my inn. It was not what I should have thought a short way, but it was delightfully secluded, and it led us by quite

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my nerves that day that made me a little proudly fancy such things, for I was not only highly strung, I was unusually exhilarated. It was a great change since our last meeting, for this time I felt that I had at last gained a definite advantage, and, little as he showed it, I thought I was talking with a desperate man. It is not safe to be dealing with a desperate man, but, if you happen not to pity him, it is not a disagreeable sensation. As we passed over a footbridge (I was going first, and there were stakes and big stones below on which a man might hurt himself if he fell) it was probably one of my fancies that the shadow of my companion, cast before him, made an odd, quick movement with its arm. Anyhow, I turned my head and said with a laugh what a handsome stick Mr. Vane-Cartwright was carrying. I asked what wood it was. I did not ask whether it was loaded. He told me what wood it was, where he bought it and what he gave for it. He told me what an interesting medallion was set in the head of it, but he did not show me that medallion. After that I had a further fancy. It was that my guide took less polite pains than he had taken to let me pass first through every narrow

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place. Let me say at once that I do not suppose he very seriously thought of attacking me there; perhaps his eyes were open for any very favourable spot, but perhaps it was all my fancy. In spite of that fancy I was thoroughly enjoying my walk. It was a new sensation, to me to be doing most of the conversation, and I was surprised and pleased with myself to think that I was doing it well. Perhaps I was doing it well, but I do not think it was my guidance of the talk which brought it back to the subject of Trethewy. Vane-Cartwright managed to tell me that he hoped no rumour of suspicion attached to Trethewy here, or to any one at all connected with him. Would I mind trying to find this out from the landlord at the inn. He was a greater gossip than any old woman in the place, and a shrewder one. "I would not," he added, "trust everything he says, for he embroiders on what he has heard; but he hears everything, and he is shrewd, and I discovered a few weeks back that he had an acquaintance in your old parish."

By this time we were at the inn door, and I noticed the landlord's name, which was the same as that of a man of doubtful character who had

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come to Long Wilton just before I left it. Several people were about, and they might, if they chose, hear every word of what he spoke, except when he dropped his voice. "Stop," he cried, and I stood still. "I am going to be open with you, Mr. Driver, as open as I thought you would have been with me. I have been trying to bring myself to it all this walk, and I will now. I have not said what I meant" (here he dropped his voice) "about Trethewy. I have really" (this in a whisper) "begun to suspect him myself. Oh, yes, you laugh; I know what you suspect of me. Do you think I cannot see what interpretation you put upon every one of my doings that you know of, in your own house, at Peters' before—long ago at the island of Sulu, I daresay. You think" (this time so loud that I thought the landlord and other men must hear, though, as I reflected later, the phrase he used was so chosen that a countryman would not readily take it in), "you think I am the assassin of Eustace Peters. Well, I am not."

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for I have thought it so long, but hanging for it and being guilty of it are different matters." He kept his eyes fixed steadily on me all this while. "You thought things looked ugly for Trethewy once, did you not? But I know you thought him innocent when it was hard to think so. I do not ask you to believe me, but I ask you to keep the same firm, clear mind now. You think Trethewy did not kill Peters. So do I. He did not actually kill him, he no more did that than you did. Now I know you will answer me straight. You are too brave a man to care about playing the part you played at Florence. Have you found or have you not found any direct evidence whatever, true or false, that convicts any man—convicts him if it is true—of making those tracks, or of going to or coming from the place where they were made? Shall I repeat my question? Is it not clear, or are you still uncertain whether you will answer it?" I could do no other; I told him truly that I had nothing but inference to go upon as to who made those tracks, and I told him that my inference pointed to him. "Natur-

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have something better than that inference, remember that there may be more subtle motives than you think of for making false tracks. Anyway (for it is no good my arguing with you further, I see that), here is one piece of advice that you may take or leave—honestly, you had better take it if you value your future peace of mind—keep your mind open a little longer. Go away from here, and visit Long Wilton again and hear what they say there now; or, if you will not do that, stay here long enough to watch Trethewy, and the girl, and the people that you may see about with them,—one man in particular. Well, good-bye, Mr. Driver, pardon my saying I respect you in spite of Florence." The manner of this last remark was maddening. I was keenly stung. I said, "Mr. Vane-Cartwright, after all, Peters' death is not the only mysterious death you and I know of." "Oh, Longhurst," he said, with a light laugh which this time really took me aback. "I will tell you anything you can wish to know about poor Longhurst. Not now, as you are not in the mind for it. To-night, if you think better of

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turned away, "old Peters had asked me straight out about Longhurst." He had puzzled me but he had not shaken me. Could he have imagined that he was likely to do so? Probably not, but it occurred to me, directly he was gone, that he now knew for certain that I was dangerous; knew that in some ways he could play upon me easily, and in some ways not at all; and knew that I had not yet found out what I came to find out from Ellen Trethewy.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

WHETHER it was that my fancies pursued me to the inn, or that Vane-Cartwright's words had unconsciously impressed me, I took and have retained a great dislike to the gentleman who was just arriving at the inn. He came, as he said, for dry-fly fishing, but his accent and his looks showed him to be native to a land where dry fly-fishing is, I believe, not practised. He was near me and about me several times in the course of that day, and though he molested me in no way, my dislike deepened. It was now near midday and I contemplated taking no further step till evening, so I had plenty of time for thought, and I needed it. It may be imagined that I was in a state of some tension. I had rested little since I left Vane-Cartwright's hotel at Florence, and on arriving at the inn I had news which increased my agitation. My wife had telegraphed to my home saying she had gone for a day or two to the Hôtel de

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Brunswick, saying also, that I must pay no attention to any wire, purporting to be from her, which did not contain the word "Fidele". Evidently there was some one in Florence whom she suspected would send false messages. I conjectured that Vane-Cartwright had an understanding with the Mafia, and had obtained through them the services of some villain. Well, here was a wire: "Regret to acquaint respected sir, Mrs. Driver suddenly unwell.—Direttore Hôtel Brunswick."

There is one advantage about being tired. It prevents the mind from wandering away on so many side tracks. But with all that advantage, whatever it may be worth, it took me a full half-hour to make up my mind how to regard this; but I came back to my first impulse, not on the first occasion to disregard what my wife herself had undoubtedly telegraphed.

On the other main points I may acquit myself of having wavered, and I will not mystify the reader more than I mystified myself. I had not the faintest doubt that Vane-Cartwright's suggestion about the Trethewy family, whatever its object might be, was a well-acted lie. However, I determined to follow the suggestion to some

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extent. I got hold of the landlord; he was all that Vane-Cartwright had said, and on a very slight hint he began talking of the Long Wilton murder and of the charge against Trethewy. I was disgusted to find that suspicion had followed the people here. It was not clearly to Vane-Cartwright's interest that it should follow them, and I suppose it was accident. I found that the landlord was well posted as to Trethewy's story and all the proceedings in regard to him. As he went on hinting suspicion of him, I said it was a curious thing about those tracks. "Ah," said he, "little feet can wear big shoes;" and he looked wise. "About that lass now of Trethewy's, not but what I like the lass," he was continuing after a solemn interval, but I need not try to repeat his talk. The upshot of the suggestion was simply this, that the girl had stepped out in her father's boots and made the tracks, knowing full well that she could ensure the detection of the false tracks hereafter, but for which of two reasons rumour was not certain. Either it was really to fasten false suspicion on her father

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mitted the crime, and she knew it, and to save him had fabricated against him evidence which he and she knew would be broken down.

It was not a likely story to tell to me, and I was inclined now, not for the first time, to be thankful that however great a fool I might be, I looked a greater fool than I was. By putting me up to eliciting this story, Vane-Cartwright had merely supplied me with knowledge about the situation of the Trethewys which I might find useful in dealing with them.

I felt that I had brought danger not only upon myself but also upon the Trethewys. I was in some doubt whether by going to them again that night I might not be bringing danger nearer them, but the impulse to be beside them if danger were there impelled me to go. I arrived about nightfall. I found Trethewy himself preparing to leave the house. He had been bidden to go and help in repairing a threatening breach of a mill-dam some way up the stream, and he evidently felt surprised and suspicious about the errand on which he was sent. Replying to a look of enquiry in my face, he said: "Sir, I never disobeyed my master's orders yet". "No," he added, looking

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suddenly abashed, "I behaved badly enough by my old master, but I never disobeyed orders, and I should not like to begin doing so now." I said that, if he went I should stay at his house till he returned. He said, "It would be a kindness that I should always remember, sir". And so he went.

Poor Mrs. Trethewy appeared ill-pleased at my presence. She seemed to guess that my coming was in some way to disturb their peace. I fancied that, in getting the mastery over his drinking and his wrathful ways, Trethewy had become very gentle and submissive to his wife. In her days of difficulty I had been used to admire her for the way in which she brought up her daughter. I now did not think her improved by finding herself more the mistress of her house than she was wont to be. Still she was civil enough, and willing, after the girl had gone to bed in a sort of cupboard off the parlour-kitchen, to entertain me with her best conversation. I interrupted by telling her frankly that I knew

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that day that rumour had followed them to their new home. From my heart I pitied her, for she seemed utterly cast down as she began to realise that Ellen must come to hear all, if indeed she had not heard it already.

Suddenly the girl burst into the room and threw her arms round her mother's neck. "Oh, mother, mother!" she said, "I cannot keep on deceiving you. Dear, kind mother, who wanted to deceive me for my good. I would have given so much that you should not know this, but grandmother told me all." "Go to bed now, dear," said her mother; "I cannot bear more to-night." The mother too went to bed, and I lay down under a rug upon the sofa.

I had no intention of keeping awake all night. Gladly as in my excited state I would have done so, it was a necessity that I should get such rest as I could. I lay on a shake-down which Mrs. Trethewy provided for me, and I thought of Florence and of one whom I had left at Florence. Then I slept, and I dreamed, dreamed that she was ill and wanted me. I

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God, it was a dream. I assured myself of that and slept again to dream more pleasantly.

I dreamed I was a boy and I was swimming in a clear river. Cool, cool river!

There was a fish in the river, and I was swimming after the fish. Cool, cool river!

It was an ugly fish, and I was pursuing it, and the river was warm.

The fish was Vane-Cartwright, and I was pursuing him. Warm, warm river!

The river was gone from my dream, and I was pursuing Vane-Cartwright over a great plain. Warmer and warmer!

I pursued him through thick woodlands. Sultry and stifling!

I pursued him over a great mountain. Burning, burning hot!

I leapt to my feet calling "Fire!"

In waking fact, the thatched cottage was in a blaze.

I called with all my might to Mrs. Trethewy. *I* told her to run out while I brought out her daughter, and she answered.

I burst into the girl's little room on the ground

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bed, and bore her through the door and on to the footbridge. I turned my head back towards the house to call again to Mrs. Trethewy, when a hoarse cry of "Fire!" came from the other direction, and a man—he seemed an old grey-bearded rustic—ran on to the bridge towards the door, dashed with full force against us, and overturned me and my half-conscious burden.

I do not know just how we rolled or fell, but we were in the water. I had managed still to hold Ellen Trethewy with my right arm, and with my left hand to catch the edge of the footbridge. I could not by any effort have pulled us both out or raised her on to the bridge, but it was easy to hold our heads above water, for we were against the pier of the bridge, in between the two currents that shot under the arches. Mrs. Trethewy would be there in a moment and could help us out; or—why did not that old rustic help us?

They say that men in moments of extreme

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I glanced up, and the old rustic stood over us raising a mighty stick which I thought was not that which Vane-Cartwright had carried in the morning. So much I did see and think.

One good blow and I should have been stunned, if my brains were not out. Whether we got entangled in the eel grating or were carried right under the fish-house into the pool, there was little chance for either of our lives if that blow had fallen where it was aimed.

I let go my hold on the bridge and threw my head back, and the stick crashed idly on the bricks of the margin. I tried to get one long breath before we went under, but I swallowed a horrible gulp of water. Good chance or my convulsive effort guided us into the arch for which I would have steered. Under one arch the old eel grating remained. I did not know its structure, and I did not know whether the trap-door over it was fastened down, but there was little hope that we should pass that way alive. Under the other arch, as I had found that morning, the grating had long been removed, and down that archway the strong stream was carrying us, safe, if it did not throttle us on the way. How long a passage I thought it, though

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the rush of the water seemed so headlong. I could feel the slimy growth on the brick archway above us, and my nostrils were for a moment above water though my mouth was pressed under. Then we were under the floor of the fish-house, and my head rose and I got a gulp of air, but my head struck a joist of the floor, and the stream swept me on, ducking involuntarily under another joist and another. We were out in the pool, sucked down in the bubble and swirl of the eddy. I opened my eyes and could see the glare of the fire through great green globes of water. I was on the surface; I was swimming with great gasps; I was under again; I was exhausted. My feet struck on pebbles: I was standing in the shallow water. I still held the body. Was it lifeless? Three strides and I should land her on the bank. No, my steps sank in some two feet of almost liquid mud. The dragging of my steps furnished just the little further effort needed to spend my re-

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of the pool and stood over us. That dire old rustic, I felt no doubt, and I felt no care. No, it was the girl's father.

In the morning, shooting down that same dark cool avenue of sweet water, and swept without an effort far out into the swirling reed-fringed pool, I could not have imagined how hardly and how ill I was to pass that way again with a living or lifeless burden.

She lived; the first shock of the water had roused her, and she had kept a shut mouth, a steady grasp where it least incommoded me and a heroic presence of mind.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THERE is not much that can be done for a thatched cottage once well alight, and for such salvage as could be done there were plenty of ready helpers soon upon the scene. That aged rustic was not among them, nor did I afterwards see or hear of him; but among them before long appeared Vane-Cartwright himself, brisk and alert, and forward to proffer to Trethewy every sort of help and accommodation for his now homeless family. Trethewy's response was characteristic—total and absolute silence.

It seemed late but was still early morning when I had the Trethewys assembled for breakfast in my private sitting-room in my inn. Neighbours had readily supplied the women

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from the first, of being in Vane-Cartwright's service, and he told me that he had just decided to accept a situation which was open to him in Canada, and had expected to sail with his family, who did not yet know it, in six weeks, but supposed he must put it off now.

At last I really heard what it was that Ellen Trethewy could tell and for knowing which she had been removed to Crondall, and it did not come up to my expectations.

About noon after Peters' murder, after Callaghan and I had gone into the village, and while Vane-Cartwright, by his own account, had stayed reading in the house, the girl had twice seen him as she looked out of the window of the cottage. She had seen him come out of the gate of the drive and turn to the right up the road away from the village. About twenty minutes later she had seen him turn in again at the gate, and this time he came down the green lane. To any one who knew the lie of the ground, the significance of this was certain. He could not have got round by road or by any public footpath in that time; either he had come through the plantation and the fields, where the tracks were made, or he must have

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made a round over ditches and hedges and rough ground by which a man taking a casual and innocent stroll was extremely unlikely to have gone, especially in frost and snow.

The inference was convincing enough to me, but then, as I knew, I was ready to be convinced. Vane-Cartwright was not likely, I felt, to have done so much to prevent the girl revealing merely this. Was there nothing more?

Yes, there was, but it was something of which Ellen did not feel sure. During that twenty minutes the sun shone out brilliantly upon the snow, and tempted her to stroll out a little way up the drive, when she stood for awhile to look, in spite of the horror of the time, with delight at the spotless covering of the lawn and the shining burden of the cedar branches, and then up at the sun. Her eyes were soon so dazzled that all sorts of fancied shapes danced before them. Turning suddenly and looking towards the field, she thought for an instant, but only an instant, that she saw between two trees a man up in the field, about half-way up, walking towards the hedge, towards a spot in the hedge which we already know. She covered her eyes with her hand and looked again with

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clearer vision. There was no one there, and she tried to brush aside the fancy that she had seen any one. But somehow she had often wondered since about what she had seen, and somehow she connected it in her fancy with the murder. She could not connect it with the making of the tracks, for she had only read of them in a muddled newspaper report which had given an entirely wrong impression as to whereabouts they were found. Now it was all obvious. Vane-Cartwright, while he made those very tracks, had passed before her eyes; he had seen her standing and looking towards him, and he could not entertain the hope, though it was true, that her eyes did not see him clear.

This much being plain, my first thought was of amazement at the coolness of Vane-Cartwright on the evening after the murder, while he could not be sure that the discovery of the tracks had not been told to the girl and had not already drawn forth from her an explanation which, if believed, must be fatal to him. My second thought was of great disappointment that the identification of him with the maker of the tracks was still to so large an extent a matter of inference. I cannot say whether I myself,

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or Trethewy, or the girl, who, having long brooded over these matters without the necessary clue, now showed astonishing quickness in grasping them, was first to see the next step which the enquiry required. Evidence must be sought which would show whether Vane-Cartwright or some other person had undone the window-latch in Peters' room. I was ready immediately to rush off to Long Wilton and see whether Sergeant Speke could recollect anything of importance about the movements of the persons who were in the room that morning. It was the girl who suggested to me a possible witness rather nearer at hand. The young doctor had been in the room till nearly the last, and, as her mother happened to have told her, he had very shortly after the event in question removed to London. Could not I see him?

I resolved to see him, if I could, that day, for I thought I could gain nothing by further waiting near Crondall. I was anxious about the safety of Ellen Trethewy, but I found her father, who was as much persuaded as I of the peril which continued to hang over her, had

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and it reassured me to see a reminiscence of his wild youth sparkle in his now sober countenance as he said that it would not be the first time that he had baffled a pursuit.

Upon some calculation, prompted perhaps by excessive precaution and futile craft, such as may well be excused in excited men who have found themselves surrounded by unimagined dangers, we decided that I should not start for any of the stations on the branch line that passes Crondall, but should leave my luggage behind, drive, in a fast trap which the baker sometimes let out, to an ancient castle in the neighbourhood, thence, three miles, to the junction on the main line to London, send the trap back with a note to my landlord, and go to town by the one fast train in the day which there was easy time to catch. I suppose we thought I should get some start of Vane-Cartwright, and that this was worth while, as he was likely to stick close to me, and had shown already his fertility of baleful resource.

Accordingly, I arrived at the junction just as the up-train came in. The train from Crondall had arrived a little while before, and was standing in a bay on the other side of my platform

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of departure. I was by this time so sleepy that I could hardly keep my eyes open as I walked. I did barely notice the screaming approach of a third train, which was in fact the down-train from London, but in which of course I felt no interest, and I noticed some but not quite all of the people on the platform or in the waiting-shed. I took my seat in the far corner of a carriage. I began instantly to doze, and the train, I believe, waited there awhile. I faintly heard shouts and whistles which heralded the starting of the train, but it did not start immediately. When the carriage door again opened and two other passengers got in, I did half-open my eyes; but I started broad awake when to those half-open eyes my fellow-passengers revealed themselves as Vane-Cartwright and the foreign visitor at the inn, whose looks I had irrationally disliked. I say broad awake—but not awake enough to do the proper thing to be done. The train was already in motion before they sat down, and my fellow-passengers with their luggage so encumbered the door that I could not have got back on to the platform. I ought, I suppose, to have pulled the communication cord. As it was, I merely sat up, looking

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at them as indifferently as I could, while really my heart sank within me, and I wished my muscles had not been so stiff and chilled from my adventure of the night before.

The train was moving but not yet fast. It seemed to be slowing down again. There was fresh shouting and whistling on the platform; the stationmaster saying angrily, "Put him in here"; a voice that sounded somehow well known, but which I could not recognise, answering him vigorously; and just as the train began to go faster a big man, still shouting and very hot with pursuit, tumbled into the carriage. To my delighted surprise I found myself joined by Callaghan.

The most surprising turns of good fortune, I have learned to think, are generally the reward of more than common forethought on the part of some one. My rescue in this case, which I will none the less call providential, could never have happened but for the zealous care of Callaghan himself, and of another person many hundred miles from the scene.

But of all this I was soon to hear. Mean-

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nition, and poured himself forth upon Vane-Cartwright with an exuberance of pleasure at the unexpected meeting which must have been maddening. It was the only time, during my acquaintance with Vane-Cartwright, when he appeared to be in the least at a loss. Hearty good-humour was, I should think, the only attitude towards him which he did not know how to meet. So he passed, I take it, a miserable journey. Nor was his mysterious companion left to enjoy himself. To my astonishment Callaghan addressed him politely by a strange-sounding name, which I suppress, but which from the start which the gentleman gave appeared to be his name.

As for me, Callaghan leaving me in the corner which I had originally chosen had manœuvred Vane-Cartwright into the other corner of the same side of the carriage, and the stranger into the seat opposite him, while he placed himself between me and Vane-Cartwright, and with his back half-turned towards me entertained them both.

I dozed away again and again, and I daresay I was asleep for a good part of the journey, but I endeavoured to think out in my waking

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moments what was the nature of the peril which had threatened me, for peril assuredly there was, and how it could have come about that I was thus rescued.

As to the former question, I got no further than the reflexion, that to stick me with a knife and jump on the line or make a bolt at the London terminus (which was our first stop) would have been too crude for the purpose. As to the latter question, Callaghan, suffering our fellow-passengers to escape for a moment behind their newspapers, roused me with a nudge, and surreptitiously passed me what proved to be several pounds' worth of telegraphic message from my wife at Florence to himself. I was hardly yet aware how thoroughly my wife's original aversion for Callaghan had given way in the day when he had been her guest, and when she had passed from observing his weaknesses to putting up with them and occasionally reproving them. I learned now that a few hours after I had left her, my wife

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which might determine my movements, and entreating him to find me, and having found me, never to leave me alone. But that was not all. The telegram stated that Vane-Cartwright was on his way home, having sent home one communication only, a telegram to a registered telegraphic address in London, that address being the word by which Callaghan had accosted the stranger.

As I afterwards learned, my wife, directly I had departed, had removed to Vane-Cartwright's hotel. Vane-Cartwright did not know her by sight, and, if he had discovered her, he was the sort of man who would probably despise the intelligence of any nice woman. She had taken the best rooms in the hotel, close to Vane-Cartwright's, and had otherwise set about, for the first time in her life, and for a few hours, to throw money about in showy extravagance. By money and flattery she had contrived to be informed of the address of every letter and telegram that Vane-Cartwright sent before his

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had returned and had enquired whether she had moved to that hotel, but had not asked to see her. She learned also that Vane-Cartwright had been at the station when the Milan train started, but had returned and waited for the next train. The reader already knows that she had had the intuition that false messages might be sent me in her name.

Callaghan had been away from home, and had not got the message till late in the evening before he joined me. He lost no time in going to my house to ascertain my address and what had last been heard of me. He called also at Vane-Cartwright's house, where he was only informed that he was abroad. He left London by the first train in the morning armed with a *Bradshaw* and a map. Study of *Bradshaw* had led him to notice that I might possibly be leaving by a train which would be at the junction about the same time as his. So he was on the look out, and with his quick sight actually saw me in my train as he arrived. By running hard

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that Vane-Cartwright, who had not been conversational before, had just started an interesting subject by which he hoped to detain Callaghan while our mysterious companion got away from the train. It was not a successful effort. Callaghan pushed me somewhat rudely out of the carriage, and jumping out after me told me to wait for him, and kept me, while he stood about on the platform till every passenger by the train but ourselves had gone away. At last he called a hansom; still he did not enter it till the driver of an invalid carriage which had been waiting in the rank of cabs appeared to give up the expectation that the person for whom he waited was coming, and drove away.

"Do you see that invalid carriage?" said Callaghan to me. "It was ordered for you."

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CHAPTER XX.

HERE let me mention that I have fancied since that I recognised the ill-looking foreigner who was with me at the inn and in the train. I recognised him in a chemist's shop in a very fashionable shopping street. I think it would be libellous to name the street. The telegraphic address which my wife sent to Callaghan was the telegraphic address of that fashionable chemist's shop.

I had intended to take leave of Callaghan for the time upon our arrival at the station, but I found that this was not to be done, for Callaghan was determined to obey almost to the letter my wife's behest to him, not to leave me. He took me to luncheon at a restaurant, and then prevailed upon me to come with him by one of our fast trains to my own house, collect there all the papers which I possessed bearing on the affair of Peters, and bring them to his chambers, where he was resolved I should at present stay.

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When we arrived there, I was for starting at once to seek out the doctor who had been at Long Wilton, but I was practically overpowered and sent to bed, after handing over to Callaghan, amongst other papers, the notes which Peters had made as to the death of Longhurst.

After some hours Callaghan entered my room to tell me that dinner would be ready in half an hour, that I might get up for it if I liked, or have it brought to my bedroom. He then turned on me reproachfully. "Why had I not shown him these papers long ago, when he came to stay with me?" I was at a loss for an answer, for in fact when I had told him of my suspicions and my reasons for them, I had done the thing by halves, because my want of confidence in him lingered.

"Well, well," said my good-natured friend, "I daresay I can guess the reason. But these papers explain much to me. You never told me it was the island of Sulu on which Peters discovered the body, or that he went there with Dr. Kuyper. I had heard the name of that island and the doctor before—on the last night of Peters' life while you were talking music with Thalberg."

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Next morning I set off early to see the doctor who had been at Long Wilton. Callaghan, who at first seemed to think it his duty to be with me everywhere, gave way and consented to go upon some business of his own about which he was very mysterious; but he put me in the charge of his servant, a man singularly fitted to be his servant, an Irishman and an old soldier, who, I discovered, had made himself very useful to him in his spying upon Thalberg, having entered into a close and I daresay bibulous friendship with one of Thalberg's clerks. My new guardian so far relaxed his precautions as to allow me to be alone with the doctor in his consulting-room; he otherwise looked after me as though he thought me a child, and from the very look of him one could see that I was well protected, though indeed I hardly imagined then that the perils which beset me at Crondall would follow me through the streets of London.

I asked the doctor kindly to give me all his recollections as to what occurred in Peters' bedroom while he was there. He told me little but what was of a professional nature, and he informed me rather dryly that he made it his practice on all occasions to observe only what

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concerned him professionally. I therefore put to him with very little hope the main question which I had come to ask—Had he observed anything about the windows. "Certainly," he said, "that, as it happens, is a professional matter with me. I never enter a sickroom without glancing at the windows, and I did so from force of habit this time, though" (and he laughed with an ugly sense of humour) "it didn't matter much, as no fresh air could have revived that patient; but the windows were shut, and (for I often notice that too) they were tight shut and latched." "Are you certain," I said, "that both of them were latched?" "Certain," he answered; "they were both latched when I came into the room, and they were latched when I went out, for I happened to have looked again. You see that, once one has the habit of noticing a certain kind of thing, one always notices it and remembers it easily, however little else one may see." I asked him then whether he happened to remember the order in which the persons who had then been in the room left it. About this he was not so certain, but he had an impression that only two persons were left in the room after him. These were

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the police-sergeant, who held the door open for a moment while Vane-Cartwright lingered, and who locked it when they had all left. I may say at once that this was afterwards confirmed by the police-sergeant, who added that Vane-Cartwright was standing somewhere not far from the window in question.

I returned by appointment to Callaghan's chambers some time before eleven. I was immediately taken out by him again upon an errand which he refused to explain. We arrived at length at an office in the City which from the name on the door proved to be that of Mr. Thalberg, Solicitor and Commissioner for Oaths. We were ushered into Mr. Thalberg's private room, and it immediately appeared that Callaghan had come to give instructions for the making of his will. He explained my being there by saying there was a point in his will about which he desired to consult both of us. I was thus compelled to be present at what for a while struck me as a very tedious farce. Callaghan, after consulting Mr. Thalberg upon the very elementary question whether or not he thought it an advisable thing that a man should make a will, and after beating about the bush

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in various other ways, went on to detail quite an extraordinary number of bequests, some of them personal, some of a charitable kind, which he desired to make. There was a bequest, for example, of the Sèvres porcelain in his chambers to his cousin, Lady Belinda McConnell (there was no Sèvres porcelain in his chambers, and I have never had the curiosity to look up Lady Belinda McConnell in the Peerage). So he went on, disposing, I should think, of a great deal more property than he possessed, till at last the will appeared to be complete in outline, when he seemed suddenly to bethink him of the really difficult matter for which he had desired my presence. By this time, I should say, it had begun to dawn upon me that the pretended will-making was not quite so idle a performance as I had at first thought. Callaghan must in the course of it have produced on a person, who knew him only slightly, the impression of a good-natured, eccentric fellow, wholly without cunning and altogether unformidable. This was one point gained, but moreover, Mr. Thalberg was rapidly falling into that nervous and helpless condition into which a weak man of business can generally be thrown by the unkind

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expedient of wasting his time. It now appeared that the real subject on which Mr. Thalberg and I were to be consulted was the disposal of Callaghan's papers in the event of his death. Callaghan explained that he would leave behind him if he died (and he felt, he said, that he might die suddenly) a great quantity of literary work which he should be sorry should perish. He would leave all his papers to the discretion of certain literary executors (he thought these would perhaps be Mr. George Meredith and Mr. Ruskin), but there were memoirs among them relating to a sad affair in which persons living, including Mr. Thalberg and myself, were in a manner concerned. He referred to the lamented death of Mr. Peters, the circumstances connected with which had been for him a matter of profound and he trusted not unprofitable study. He felt that in any directions he might leave in regard to these memoirs it was only fair that he should consult the gentle-

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address of a certain person to whom he must telegraph to put off an appointment with him. A clerk brought the London Directory from an outside room, and was about to retire. "Stop a moment, Mr. Clerk, if you don't mind," said Callaghan, and he slightly edged back his chair, so as to block the clerk's going out, "perhaps it is the Suburban Directory that I want. Let us just look," and he began turning over the leaves. "Ferndale Avenue," he said, "that's not it; Ferndale Terrace—you see, Mr. Thalberg," he said, "I would like to talk this matter out with you before I go—Ferndale Crescent—right side, No. 43, 44, No." (all this time his finger was running down a column under the letter B in the Trades Directory) "45, 46, 47; I thought he was thereabouts. Here's the name," he said. "You see, Mr. Thalberg, your own movements, if they were not explained, would look rather curious—47, 49, no, that's not it—look rather curious, as I was saying, in connexion with that murder of Peters—look ugly, you know—51 Ferndale Crescent, that's it. Thank you, Mr. Clerk," and he shut the Directory with a bang and handed it back to the clerk with a bow, and made way for him to leave the room.

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Mr. Thalberg bounded from his chair and collapsed into it again. "Stop, Mr. Manson," he cried to the clerk, "you must be present at whatever else this gentleman may have to say." He sat for a moment breathing hard, more I thought with alarm than with anger. He did not seem to me to have any presence of mind or any of the intellectual attributes, at any rate, of guile, and I could not help wondering as I watched him, whether this really was the man whom Vane-Cartwright chose for his agent in employments of much delicacy. "Do you come here to blackmail me, sir?" cried Mr. Thalberg, forcing himself to assume a voice and air of fury. There was never seen anything more innocent or more surprised and pained than the countenance of Callaghan as he replied. He was amazed that his motive could be so misunderstood; it was the simple fact that what he was forced in his memoirs to relate might hereafter suggest suspicions of every one who was in the neighbourhood of the crime, himself and his friend Mr. Driver in particular, and, though in a less degree of course, Mr. Thalberg. He was giving Mr. Thalberg precisely the same opportunity as he had given to Mr. Driver, of

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explaining those passages in his (Callaghan's) record, which might seem to him to require explanation. Here he appealed to me (and I confess I backed him up) as to whether he had not approached me in precisely the same way. Mr. Thalberg appeared to pass again under the spell of his eccentric visitor's childlike innocence, and sat patiently but with an air of increasing discomfort while Callaghan ran on: "You see, in your case, Mr. Thalberg, it's not only your presence at Long Wilton, which was for golf of course, wasn't it?—only you went away because of the snow. There is that correspondence with a Dutch legal gentleman at Batavia which occurred a little afterwards, or a little before was it? And there were the messages which I think you sent (though perhaps that was not you) to Bagdad. Of course I shall easily understand if you do not care to enlighten me for the purpose of my memoirs which no one may care to read. Pray tell me if it is so. I daresay it's enough for you that your correspondence and movements will of

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possible that Mr. Thalberg had not heard the news, which was already in two or three evening papers, that there was a warrant out for the arrest of Vane-Cartwright, and that it was rumoured that he had been arrested in an attempt to escape from the country.

In Mr. Thalberg's countenance increased anguish now struggled ludicrously with the suspicion, which even he could not wholly put aside, that he was being played upon in some monstrous way. He began some uncertain words and desisted, and looked to his clerk appealingly. That gentleman (not, I believe, the same that had fallen under the sway of Callaghan's faithful servant) seemed the incarnation of the most solid respectability. He was, I should judge, of the age at which he might think of retiring upon a well-earned competence, and he gave Thalberg no help, desiring, I should think, to hear the fullest explanation of the startling and terrible hint which had been thrown out before him against his master's character. While Thalberg sat irresolute, Callaghan drew a bow at a venture.

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interview with Dr. Verschoyle when you went to Homburg to see him." "Sir," said Thalberg, making a final effort, "do you imagine that I shall tell you what passed at an interview to which I went upon my client's business." "Thank you, Mr. Thalberg," said Callaghan. "I am interested to know that you went to Homburg on your client's business (I thought it might have been for the gout), and that you did see Dr. Verschoyle, for I had not known that till you told me. I did know, however, about that correspondence with Madrid in the Spanish Consul's cipher, and I knew that the enquiries you made through him were really addressed to an influential person at Manilla."

At this point Mr. Thalberg abruptly went over, with horse, foot and artillery, to the enemy. He assured Callaghan of his perfect readiness to answer fully any questions he might ask about his relations with Vane-Cartwright, and if he might he would tell him how they began.

This is what it came to. Thalberg had been partner to a lawyer who was Longhurst's solicitor. In the early part of 1882, when Longhurst had spent a month in England, he had consulted Thalberg's partner about some

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matters that troubled him in regard to his partnership with Vane-Cartwright. Thalberg could not remember (so at least he said) the precise complaint which Longhurst had laid before his partner, except that it related to Vane-Cartwright's having got concessions and acquired property for himself which Longhurst considered (without foundation, as Thalberg supposed) should have belonged to the partnership. Nor did Thalberg know the advice which had been given Longhurst. He had heard no more of him beyond the mere report that he had been drowned, till, after his death, Vane-Cartwright, whom Thalberg had not previously known, came to London and employed the firm to find out various members of Longhurst's family who were still living, and to whom he now behaved with great generosity. Since then Thalberg had been, as we knew, solicitor of a company which Vane-Cartwright had founded, and had occasionally done for him private law work of a quite unexciting nature. But in the middle of January of last year, 1896, Thalberg had been instructed by Vane-Cartwright to make for him with the utmost privacy certain enquiries. One was of a person in Bagdad, as

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to the identity and previous history of a certain Mr. Bryanston; one concerned a certain Dr. Kuyper, a physician and scientist in Batavia, who, it was ascertained, was now dead. Another was, as Callaghan knew, addressed to a correspondent in Madrid, but Thalberg declared that this enquiry went no further than to ascertain the name and address of the person who then filled the office of Public Prosecutor or, I think, Minister of Justice in the Philippines. I ventured to ask the name; it was a name that I had seen before in those notes of Peters'. Lastly, there was an enquiry in regard to Dr. Verschoyle. Thalberg had been instructed if possible to obtain an interview with this gentleman before a certain date. The purpose of the interview, he declared, was to obtain from him some notes and journals which would be of use in the foundation of a new mission in the Philippines, under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, a project in which Vane-Cartwright appeared, he said, to be keenly interested (and indeed it was the fact

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repair there without fail by the date on which he actually came, and to inform Vane-Cartwright by word of mouth of the result, if any, of his enquiries. That result had been, shortly: that Bryanston was the man who had at one time been at Nagasaki; that Kuyper was dead; that the Minister of Justice (or whatever the precise office was) at Manilla was the person already alluded to; and that Verschoyle was abroad and had lately been at Siena, but had departed abruptly some weeks before — for Germany, it was thought, but he had left no address behind him. All this Thalberg had duly reported to Vane-Cartwright in Peters' house the afternoon before the murder occurred. And what all this taught Vane-Cartwright, though in part obscure, is in part obvious. It taught him that no letter from Verschoyle to Peters need at present be expected. It taught him that a letter from Bryanston, which must be expected, might be dangerous and must be intercepted. It taught him that Peters would remain inactive only till that letter reached his hands. It taught him also that if Peters were put to silence, Kuyper, the other European who had seen that body in Sulu, could tell no tales.

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After Peters' death, Thalberg, still acting under instructions, had had an interview with Dr. Verschoyle at Homburg, to which he had traced him, and had taken with him a letter written on the paper of the S.P.G., and signed, as he believed, by the secretary of that society. (It has since appeared that the secretary had no knowledge of such a letter.) Dr. Verschoyle delivered to him some journals which he, Thalberg, never read, for transmission to Vane-Cartwright, to whom he duly delivered them. That, he said, was all that he knew of the subjects on which Callaghan sought information. He denied all knowledge of further communications made on behalf of Vane-Cartwright with that important official in the Philippines; but he appeared to me somewhat nervous in answering Callaghan's questions on this matter, and anxious to appease him with the prospect that he might be able, through friends of his, to ascertain what communications of this nature had actually taken place.

It was curious to how many questions suggested to us by what he had said he could give no answer. Indeed he informed us, with an air of moral self-complacency, that he thought it

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a very sound maxim for a professional man to know as little as possible of things which it was not his business to know. I guessed that perhaps his strict observance of this precept was the thing which had commended him to the service of Vane-Cartwright, but I really do believe that Mr. Thalberg knew nothing behind the facts which he now thought it convenient to himself to reveal.

However that may be, he made no secret of anything which he could disclose without injury to himself. We had got from him, or I ought to say Callaghan had got from him, evidence which might serve to show plainly enough that Vane-Cartwright was aware of Peters' suspicions and concerned himself greatly about them, and, content with this, we were preparing to go when Mr. Thalberg stopped us saying that there was one important matter of which we had not asked him yet, and perhaps should be surprised to know that he could tell us anything. I have omitted to say that in the course of the conversation he had heard something from us about the things which had led to Vane-Cartwright's being suspected. We had told him in substance the story about the tracks, and were much surprised

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to find that he appeared wholly ignorant of the charge that had been brought against Trethewy. He now told us a fact which had a great bearing upon the history of those tracks. He asked us whether or not Peters' grounds could be seen from the upper rooms of the hotel. I said that no doubt they could, for the hotel was only too visible from those grounds. He then stated that having confined himself to his bedroom until it was time for him to start for his train, he had at a certain hour noticed a man walking across Peters' field (for from his description it was plain to me that it was Peters' field, and plain further that the man was walking pretty much where those tracks were made). This man, even at that distance, he recognised as Vane-Cartwright; he recognised him by his fur coat and a cap which Ellen Trethewy had seen him in, and by some peculiarity about his gait which he knew well. The man was also swinging his stick in Vane-Cartwright's own particular

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CHAPTER XXI.

As we left Thalberg's office and walked down the narrow court which led to the street, I dare-say our looks and voices, if not our words, betrayed the exultation of men who see a long-sought object at last within reach. As we turned into the street we were stopped by Vane-Cartwright.

Only the day before I had been expecting to find him lurking for me round every corner; but now and here it startled me to meet him. When I learnt why he met us, it startled me still more, and looking back upon it, I still find it unaccountable.

"Mr. Driver, Mr. Callaghan," he said, addressing us in turn in tones as quiet as ever, but with a pale face and highly strung manner

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constable. There is one. You see you have beaten me. You probably do not yet know it yourselves, but you have."

"Well," he continued, "if you do not quite know what you are going to do, I will ask one thing of you. Before you give me up to justice, take me somewhere where I can talk with you two alone. I want to tell you my story. It will not make you alter your purpose, I know that; but it will make you respect me a little more than you do. It is odd that I should want that, but I do."

"Well, gentlemen?" he said questioningly, as we still hesitated, and his old self-possession returning for a moment, a smile of positive amusement came over his face.

I confess that if I had acted on my own impulse I should have taken my antagonist at his word when he suggested that we should call the nearest policeman. But Callaghan had been taking the lead in our late movements, and I felt that the occasion belonged to Callaghan; and Callaghan was more generous.

"If you have anything to say, sir," he said, "come to my chambers and say it. Four-wheeler!"

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In a moment more we were in a cab—how slow the cab seemed—Callaghan sitting opposite Vane-Cartwright and watching him narrowly lest he should play us a trick, while I too watched him all through the interminable drive, very ill at ease as to the wisdom of our conduct, and wondering what could be the meaning of the unexpected and desperate hazard which our antagonist was now taking. He was evidently going to confess to us. But why? If the knowledge we already possessed was sufficient, as perhaps it was, to secure his conviction, yet he could only partly guess what that knowledge was; of the two most telling pieces of evidence against him, the fact about the window-latch which the surgeon had told us, and the fact that Thalberg had recognised him afar from his window in the hotel, he must have been quite unaware. And then what did he expect to gain by the interview which he had sought with us? What opinion had he formed of the mental weaknesses of the two men with whom he was playing? Was he relying overmuch upon the skill and mastery of himself and others which he would bring to bear in this strange interview? Had the fearful strain

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under which he had been living of late taken away the coolness and acuteness of his judgment? Could he rely so much upon the chance of enlisting our compassion that he could afford to give us a certainty of his guilt, which, for all he knew, we had not got before, and to throw away the hope of making an escape by flight, which with a man of his resource might easily have been successful? Or had he some other far more sinister hope than that of stirring us to unworthy pity or generosity? I could not resolve these questions, but I was inclined to an explanation which he was himself about to give us. If the cause of suspicion against him became public he would have lost everything for which he greatly cared, and he was ready to risk all upon any chance, however faint, of avoiding this. I was, as I have said, ill at ease about it all. I did not feel that after the conversation I had held with him before, Vane-Cartwright would get over me, but it is an experience which one would do much to avoid, that of listening obdurate to an appeal into which another man puts his whole heart; and more especially would one wish to have avoided

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consenting to hear that appeal in a manner which might raise false hopes. But for a more serious reason it had been a mistake to acquiesce in this interview; I had learned to know not only Callaghan's goodness of heart but his cleverness and his promptitude, but I had not learned to credit him with wisdom or with firmness; and the sort of impulsiveness, which had made him at once grant the request for this interview, might easily have further and graver consequences.

At last we were in Callaghan's room and seated ourselves round a table.

"I see," said Vane-Cartwright, "that it puzzles you gentlemen why I should ask for this interview. You think I am an ordinary criminal, which perhaps I am, and you thought that like an ordinary criminal I should try all means to save a disgraced life, which I certainly shall not do. I know that you have not got the knowledge which would convict me of murder. I do not suppose you think you have, and in any case you have not. And, if you had, I think you know I have contrivance enough to take myself off and live comfortably out of reach of the law. But I do not care for

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escape, and I do not care for acquittal. You have the means to throw suspicion on me, and that is enough for me. I cared for honour and success, and I do not care for life when they are lost." He was looking at each of us alternately with an inscrutable but quite unflinching gaze, but he now hid his eyes, and he added as if with difficulty, "Yet I did care for one other thing besides my position in the world, but that has gone from me too.

"And now," he resumed, "that my struggle is over, and that the people—more people and bigger people than you would think—who have been courting me for the last twelve months will think of me only with as just abhorrence as Thalberg himself does, I have an odd fancy, and it is this: I should like to stand a little better in the eyes of the very men who, far from courting me, have had the courage to suspect me and the tenacity to drag me down." He had raised his eyes again, but this time

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me tell you just a little more of it, and, please, if it interests you enough, question me on any point you will. I shall not shrink from answering. If a man is known to have murdered two of his friends, there cannot be much left that it is worth his while to conceal. First, I would like to speak of my early training. If I had been brought up in the gutter, you could make some allowance for that, and give me some credit for any good qualities I had shown, however cheerfully you might see me hanged for my crimes. It is not usual to suppose that any such allowance may have to be made for a man brought up to luxury and to every sort of refinement, and yet such a man too may be the victim of influences which would kill the good in most characters even more than they have in mine. You may have heard a little about my people, and perhaps know that their views and ways were not quite usual; I am not going to say one word against them (I am not that sort of man, whatever I may be), but there were two things in my boyhood

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the expectation of really great wealth, and just when I was grown up the wealth and the expectations suddenly vanished. That has happened to many men who have been none the worse for it. But then I was brought up soft. You know I am not a limp man or a coward; but I had all the bringing up of one; cared for hand and foot, never doing a thing for myself (my good people had great ideas of republican simplicity, but they were only literary ideas). None of the games, none of the sport that other boys get; no rubbing shoulders with my equals at school; no comradeship but only the company of my elders, mostly invalids. Few people know what it is to be brought up soft. But there was worse than that. You" (he was addressing Callaghan) "were piously brought up. Oh, yes, you were really. I daresay your home was not a strict one, and you were not carefully taught precepts of religion and morality or carefully shielded from the sight of evil (perhaps quite the contrary, for I have not the pleasure of knowing much about you, Mr. Callaghan), but I am quite sure that you had about you at home or at school, or both, people among whom there was some

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tacit recognition of right and wrong of some sort as things incontrovertible, and that there was some influence in your childhood which appealed to the heart. But in my childhood nothing appealed to the heart, nothing was incontrovertible, above all, nothing was tacit. Everlasting discussion, reaching back to the first principles of the universe, and branching out into such questions as whether children should be allowed pop-guns. That was my moral training, and that was all my moral training. It was very sound in principle, I daresay—and I am not going to pose as an interesting convert to the religious way of looking at things, for I am not one—but it did not take account of practical difficulties, and it was very, very hard on me. Not one man in ten thousand has had that sort of upbringing, and I do not suppose you can realise in the least how hard that sort of thing is.

"So," he continued, "I found myself at twenty-one suddenly made poor; more accustomed than most lads to think life only worth living for refinements which are for the wealthy only; taught not to take traditional canons of morality for granted; taught to think about the real utility

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of every action; landed in a place like Saigon, and thrown in the society of the sort of gentry who, we all know, do represent European civilisation in such places; sent there to get a living; thoroughly out of sympathy with all the tastes and pleasures of the people round me, and at the same time easily able to discover that for all my strange upbringing I was by nature more of a man than any one else there. As a matter of fact, there was only one decent man there with intellectual tastes, and that was Peters; but Peters, who was only two or three years older than I, and, as I own I fancied, nothing like so clever, took me under his protection and made it his mission to correct me, and it did not do. You can easily imagine how, in the three years before Longhurst came on the scene, I had got to hate the prospect of a life of humdrum, money-grubbing among those people in the hope of retiring with a

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three weeks in the place to make money on a scale which would give me the position, the society and the pursuits for which I had been trained. I resolved in fact to make the sort of place for myself in the world which every man, except the three men in this room and Thalberg, thinks I have secured. If I had no scruples as to the way in which I should carry out that resolve, I differed from the people around me only in knowing that I had no scruples, and in having instead a set purpose which I was man enough to pursue through life. And I am man enough, I hope, not to care much for life now that that purpose has failed. If I pursued my end without scruple, I think I was carrying out to its logical conclusion the principles that had been taught me as a boy; and, as I am not going to seek your sympathy on false pretences, let me tell you I do not know to-day that there are any better principles—there may be; I hope there are.

"I waited nearly three years, learning all I

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I must go back a little. I have said that Peters was my only equal in our society there. Now let me say, once for all, that in nothing that I am going to tell you do I wish to blame Peters more than I blame myself; but from the first we did not hit it off. Peters, as I have said, took on himself the part of my protector and adviser a little too obviously; he had not quite tact enough to do it well, and I was foolish enough in those days to resent what I thought his patronage. At first there was no harm done; Peters thought I should be the better if I entered more into such sport as there was in the place, for which I had very little taste, and he tried to make me do so by chaffing me about being a duffer, in his blunt way, which I thought rude, and that before other people. You would hardly imagine that I was ever shy, but I was; and, absurd as it seems, this added a good deal to my unhappiness in my new surroundings. I should very soon have got over that, for I soon

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not agree, and I daresay now that I pained him a good deal. I did not mean to do that, but I did mean to shock him sometimes, and so I often took a cynical line, by which I meant nothing at all, telling him the sharp things that I should do if I got the chance; and once or twice I was fool enough to pretend that all sorts of things of which Peters would not approve went on in our business. To my amazement I discovered after a time that Peters took all this nonsense seriously. I would have given anything to efface the impression that I had made, for though there are few men that I ever respected, Peters was one of them. But Peters became reserved towards me and impossible to get at. Then gossip came in between us. There is sometimes very spiteful gossip in a little European settlement in the East; and I am certain, though I cannot prove it, that a man there, with whom I had constant business, told Peters a story about a shady transaction which he said I was in. The transaction was real enough, but neither I nor my firm had any more to do with it than you. I know that this man told it to other people, for I have heard so from them, and I do not doubt that that was

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what finally turned Peters against me. I tried to tax Peters with having picked up this story, but he said something which sounded like disbelieving me, and I lost my temper and broke off; and from that day till we met again at Long Wilton we never exchanged any more words together, though we crossed one another's path as you shall hear.

"Mind, again, I am not saying it was his fault; but it is in itself doing a young man a very ill turn to show him that you think him dishonest when as yet he is not, and it did me harm. Upon my soul, I was honest then; in fact, in that regard, most of my dealings throughout life would stand a pretty close scrutiny. But I have often thought that I might have become a much better man if Peters would have been my friend instead of suspecting me unjustly; and I confess that it rankles to this day, and all the more because I always respected Peters. After that, however, he did me some practical ill-turns, disastrously ill turns; rightly enough, if he thought as he did. I must tell you that our separation came a very little while before Longhurst came to the place. Just afterwards I had an opening, a splendid opening; it would not

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have made me the rich man that I am, but it would have given me a good position right away, and what it would have saved me you shall judge. A very eminent person came to Saigon; he knew something of Peters and a little of me. He saw a great deal of Peters at Saigon, and he pressed him to accept a post that was in his gift in the Chinese Customs service. Peters refused. I suppose he was at that time thinking of coming home. The great man then spoke to me about it, and had all but offered it to me. How I should have jumped at it! But suddenly it all went off and he said no more to me. I believed that Peters warned him against me; possibly, being sore against Peters, I was mistaken; but at any rate that was what I ever afterwards believed. It was partly in desperate annoyance about this that I plunged into what then seemed my wild venture with Longhurst.

"And now I must tell you about Longhurst. He had been at some time, I suppose, a clever man; at least he had a wonderful store of practical knowledge about forests, mining and other matters, and he had travelled a great deal in all parts of that region of the world, and picked up

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many things which he wanted to turn to account. He had made a little money which he wished to increase, and he had a great scheme of organising and developing the trade of South-Eastern Asia and its islands in various valuable kinds of timber, spices, gum, shellac, etc., etc. He promised any one who could join him that in a few years, by exploiting certain yet undeveloped but most profitable sources of supply, he could get a monopoly of several important trades, the sago trade, for example. He set forth his scheme to the company generally at the English Club the first time I met him, and everybody laughed at him except me, who saw that if he got into the right hands there was something to be made out of his discoveries for him and other people. And as a matter of fact we did make something of them, more than I expected, but not what he expected. I did not make a large sum out of our joint venture, not much more than I could have made by staying where I was, but I got the knowledge of Eastern commerce, which has enabled me since to do what I have done.

"I saw you smile just now, Mr. Callaghan, when I spoke of Longhurst getting into the right hands. Well he did; and I did not. He

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had been, as I said, a clever man, and there was something taking about him with his bluff, frank, burly air, but he was going off when I met him. People do go downhill if they spend all their lives in odd corners of the earth; and, though I did not know it at first, he had taken the surest road downhill, for he had begun to drink, and very soon it gained upon him like wildfire. When he once goes wrong no one can be so wrong-headed as a man like that, who thinks that he knows the world from having knocked about it a great deal doing nothing settled; and I should have found Longhurst difficult to deal with in any case. As it was, Longhurst dined with Peters the night before we left Saigon together. On the first day of our voyage he was very surly to me, and he said, 'I heard something funny about you last night, Master Cartwright. I wish I had heard it before, that's all.' When I fired up and told him to say straight out what it was, he looked at me offensively, and went off into the smoking-

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tale-bearer that I mentioned before had been telling Peters some yarn about my arrangements with Longhurst, which looked as if I was trying to swindle him, and that Peters had passed it on. I very soon found that Longhurst was not so simple as he seemed. I daresay he had meant honestly enough by me at first, but having got it into his thick head that I was a little too sharp, he made up his mind to be the sharper of the two; and the result was that if I was to be safe in dealing with him I must take care to keep the upper hand of him, and before long I made up my mind that my partner should go out of the firm. I could have made his fortune if he would have let me, but I meant that the concern should be mine and not his, and I did not disguise it from him. That was my great mistake. I do not know what story, if any, you have picked up about my dealings with Longhurst. He put about many stories when we had begun to quarrel—for he had begun by that time, if not before, to drink freely—but the matter that we finally quarrelled about was this. Of the various concessions which we started by obtaining (at least I started by obtaining them; that was to be my great contribution to the

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partnership), two only proved of very great importance—one was from the Spanish Government of the Philippines and the other from the Government of Anam, and these, as it happened, were for three and four years, renewable under certain conditions but also revocable earlier in certain events. There was no trickery about that, though Longhurst may have thought there was. I simply could not get larger concessions with the means of persuasion (bribery, in other words) at our command. Subsequently I got renewals and extensions of these concessions to myself alone. To the best of my belief then and now the transaction held water in law and in equity, but whatever a lawyer might think of it, the common-sense was this: Longhurst had become so reckless and so muddle-headed that nothing could any longer prosper under his control, if he had the control, and besides that, I never could have got the extended concessions at all if he was to be one of the concessionaires. There are some things which an Eastern Government or a Spanish Government cannot stand, and Longhurst's treatment of the natives was one of them. But I must go back a bit. There were other things besides this which contributed

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to our quarrel. For one thing, odd as it may sound in speaking of two grown-up men, Longhurst bullied me—physically bullied me. He was a very powerful man, more so, I should think, even than you, Mr. Callaghan, and when, as often happened, we were travelling alone together, he used to insist on my doing as he liked in small arrangements, by the positive threat of violence. To do him justice he did not do it when he was sober, and though in those days I was a weakly and timid man compared to what I have become, I soon learned how to stop it altogether. But you can easily imagine that I did not love him; and a bitter feeling towards his chief companion is not a wholesome thing for a man to carry about through a year or two of hard work in that climate (for it is a climate! none of the dry heat and bracing winters you have in Northern India); still I hope I did not bear him malice so much for that as for other things. I have said I have no scruples, but I have no liking

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among weak savages, where law and order had not come, to put up with seeing deeds done which people here at home would not believe were done by their countrymen, and which a man who has served his days in an honourable service like the Indian Civil could believe in least of all. He had kicked a wretched man to death (for I have no doubt he died of it) the day he died himself.

"But why do I make all these excuses? for, after all, what did I do that needs so much excuse? I told Longhurst plainly what I had done about the concessions and what I proposed to do for him, and he seemed to fall in with it all, and then he went home for a month's holiday in England. I suppose he saw some lawyer, probably Thalberg, and got it into his head that he could make out a case of fraud against me. At any rate, when he returned, he seemed surly; he did not have it out with me straight, but he began to make extravagant demands of me and threaten me vaguely with some exposure if I did not give in to them, which of course I did not. Then he quarrelled about it in his cups, for the cups were getting more and more frequent, and several times over he got so violent

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as to put me in actual fear of my life. And at last, unhappily for him, it came to a real encounter. We had visited the island of Sulu, where I had reason to think we might establish a branch of our business, and after two or three days in an inland town we were returning to the coast, expecting to be picked up by a Chinese junk which was to take us back. The evening before we started down he produced a packet of documents and brandished it at me as if it contained something very damaging to me, and I could see plainly (for I have an eye for handwriting) that on the top of it was an envelope addressed by Peters. I am not justified in inferring from this that Peters—who had seen Longhurst several times since he had seen me—had again been repeating to him some malicious falsehood with which he had been stuffed before he left Saigon; but can you wonder that I did infer it? On the march down—when we were alone, for we had sent on our servants before—Longhurst began again more savagely than ever, and for about an hour he heaped all sorts of charges and vile insinuations upon me, which I answered for a while as patiently as I could. At last, breaking off in the middle of a

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curse, he fell into silence. He strode on angrily ahead for a hundred yards or so. Then at a rocky part of the path, where I was below him, he turned suddenly. He hurled at me a great stone which narrowly missed me, and then he came rushing and clambering back down the path at me. I fired (he turned as I fired). That was the end. Was it murder?" He paused and then braced himself up as he answered his own question. "Yes, it was, because I was angry, not afraid, and because I could easily have run away, only for some reason I did not mean to.

"But I am foolish to weary you with all this long preliminary story, for, after all, what do you care about Longhurst; it is Peters, your own friend, about whom you care. You think that he came to suspect me of murdering Longhurst, and I killed him for that; but as sure as I killed him, that was not—that was *not* what made me do it."

Vane-Cartwright sat for a long time with his face covered with his hands. At last he sat

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nothing? I did know of it, and I honoured him for it, but I hated him for it too. Certainly you did not suspect that there was a romance in mine. It does not seem likely that a great passion should come to a calculating man like me, with the principles of conduct of which I have made no secret to-day. But such things do happen, and a great passion came late in life to me. And here is the cruel thing, which almost breaks my philosophy down, and makes me think that after all there is a curse upon crime. It ought to have enriched and ennobled my life, ought it not? It came at just the moment, in just the shape, and with all the attendant accidents to ruin me.

"It began five years ago. Miss Denison and her parents were staying at Pau. I was in the same hotel and I met them. I knew nothing then of their position and wealth and all that, for I had not been long in London. I loved her, and a great hope came into my life. One begins to weary after a while of toiling just to make money for oneself. For a few days all seemed

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acceptable. I could not imagine the reason. I asked for an interview to explain matters, and he refused it. I left at once. I did not yet know how hard I should find it to give her up. It was only as I left the hotel that I learned that Peters, Peters whom I had not met since we quarrelled at Saigon, and of whom I last heard of the day that Longhurst died, was in the hotel and had called on my friends. Now I see clearly that I am wrong to draw inferences, but again, I ask, could I help inferring what I did?

"More than four years passed. I tried hard to create new interests for myself in artistic things, making all sorts of collections; and I developed an ambition to be a personage in London society. Then I saw Miss Denison again, and I knew that I had not forgotten her, and could not do so. I knew now what had happened, and so I absolutely insisted on an explanation. I had it out with the father. I satisfied him absolutely. In a few weeks' time I was engaged. For the first time in my life I was happy. That was only a month before I came to Long Wilton. I must tell you that Peters had known the Denisons long, and that I knew Miss Denison had been fond of him, but we naturally did not talk of

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him much, and I did not know he was at Long Wilton. There, to my complete surprise, I saw Peters again. I would not avoid him, but I certainly did not wish to meet him. He, however, came up to me and spoke quite cordially. I do not know whether he had reflected and thought he had been hard on me, but he seemed to wish to make amends, and I at that time, just for a few short hours, had not got it in my heart to be other than friendly with any man.

"That evening I spent at his house. You, Mr. Callaghan, were there, and you must have seen that something happened. I at any rate saw that something I said had revived all Peters' suspicions of me, and this time with the addition of a suspicion, which was true, that I had murdered Longhurst.

"Now, I ask you, if you have any lingering idea that that was why I killed him, how was it possible that he could ever prove me guilty? Have you any inkling of how he could have done it? I have not. Now what could induce me, on account of a mere idle suspicion on the part of a man who need be nothing to me, to run the risk amounting almost to certainty of being hanged for murdering him?

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"But my conscience was active then, for a reason which any man who has loved may guess. I wanted to clear up all with Peters. I could not get him alone that evening, and I had to go next day. I returned the first day I could, bringing certain materials for clearing up the early transaction about which he had first suspected me. I was honestly determined to make a clean breast to him about Longhurst. You can hardly wonder that I meant to feel my way with him in this. I tried to get to close quarters with him. Mr. Callaghan saw enough to know how unsuccessful I was. I tried all the time, again and again, to draw Peters into intimate talk about our days in the East, but he always seemed to push me away. I determined very soon to obtain a letter from a friend, whom I will not name now, who knew how Longhurst had treated me, which I could show to Peters; so I wrote to him. But in the meantime relations with Peters grew harder and harder. I will not spin out excuses, but all his old animosity to me returned, and I began while I was waiting for that letter to feel once again the old

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confidence, he could have made a better man of me; he had spoilt my best chance of a career; he had poisoned my relations with Longhurst, and so brought about the very crime of which he was now lying in wait to accuse me; he had thwarted my love for four miserable years. On the top of all that came this letter" (he had held a letter in his hand all the time he was speaking), "and it shall speak for itself. But first one question. You may remember when you first saw me at Long Wilton. Well, I came really as it happened upon an errand for Miss Denison. Mrs. Nicholas, in the village, you may not know, had been her nurse. But that does not matter. Between my first visit and my return, do you happen to remember that a Mrs. Bulteel was staying at the hotel, and visited Mr. Peters of whom she was an old friend?"

Callaghan remembered that it was so.

"Mrs. Bulteel is, I have always supposed, the lady referred to in this letter, which reached

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Denison, the young lady's mother. It appeared to be written in great agitation. Its purport was that the young lady had resolved, so her mother found, to break off her engagement with Vane-Cartwright. She had formerly loved another man, whose name the mother thought she must not mention, though probably Vane-Cartwright knew it, but had supposed that he did not care for her or had given up doing so. She had now learned from an officious lady friend, who had lately seen this old lover, that he cared for her still; that he had concealed his passion when he found she favoured Vane-Cartwright, but that having now apparently quarrelled with Vane-Cartwright he had authorised her to let this be known if she saw her opportunity. The mother concluded by saying that she had so far failed in reasoning with her daughter, who had wished to write and break off her engagement, and all she could do was to lay on her the absolute command not to write to Vane-Cartwright at all for the present.

"There is only one comment to make on that

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you, better than her mother did, and knew that if her old attachment had returned it had returned to stay. Besides, I read this letter with my rival sitting in the room (you two gentlemen were sitting in the room too as it happens), and when hard, self-contained people do come under these influences, they do not give way to them by halves.

"Thank you," said Vane-Cartwright, when we had read and returned the letter. "I am glad you have heard me so patiently. That all this makes me less of a villain than you thought me, I do not pretend to say; but I think you will understand why I wished some men whom I respected, as I respect you, to know my story. I do not suggest for a moment that it should influence your present action. Here I am, as I said to begin with, your prisoner. Of course you see that society is just as safe from future murders from me as from any man. But if your principles of justice demand life for life, or if human feeling makes you resolve to avenge your friend, that is just what I came here expecting. I am the last man in the world who could give an unprejudiced opinion on the ethics of punishment."

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He ended with a quiet and by no means disagreeable smile.

As I have often said I make no sort of pretence to report any talk quite correctly, and here, where the manner of the talk is of special importance, I feel more than ever my incompetence to report it. I can only say that the singular confession, of which I have striven to repeat the purport, was in reality delivered with a great deal of restrained eloquence, and with occasional most moving play of facial expression, all the more striking in a man whom I had seldom before seen to move a muscle of his face unnecessarily. It was delivered to two men of whom one (myself) was physically overwrought, while the other (Callaghan), naturally emotional, was at the commencement in the fullest elation of triumphant pursuit, in other words, ready to recoil violently.

We sat, I do not know how long, each waiting for the other to speak. Vane-Cartwright sat meanwhile neither looking at us nor moving his countenance—only the fingers of one hand kept drumming gently upon his knee.

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to speak words which my mouth seemed to utter mechanically. If they were the words of reason, they were not the words of my conscious thought, for that was busy with all, and more than all the scruples which had ever made this business hard to me.

"Mr. Vane-Cartwright," I said, "it is my painful duty to tell you at once that I do not believe one word you have said, except what I knew already."

He went white for a moment; then quickly recomposed himself and inclined his head slightly with a politely disdainful expression.

"Oh, Driver," said Callaghan, in a gentle tone, and he arose and paced the room. He was strangely moved. To begin with, though he had felt nothing but remorseless glee in his share in hunting his victim down, he would in any case have felt great repugnance at giving him the *coup de grâce*. But then he had once taken the step of inviting that victim into his own room; he had sat there for an hour and a half with that victim by his own fireside, telling his life-story and implicitly pleading for his life. And the pleading had been conducted under the flattering pretext that it was not

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pleading at all but the instinctive confidence of a redoubtable antagonist, in one whom he respected for having beaten him. As for the story itself, Callaghan did not exactly believe it; on the contrary, I found afterwards that, while I had not got beyond a vague sense that the whole story was a tissue of lies, he had noted with rapid acuteness each of the numerous points of improbability in it; but to his mind (Irish, if I may say publicly what I have said to him) the fact that the story appealed to his imaginative sympathy was almost as good as its being true, and what in respect of credibility was wanting to its effect was quite made good by Callaghan's admiration for the intrepidity with which the man had carried out this attempt on us. And the story did appeal to his sympathy, he had sympathised with his early struggles, he had sympathised still more with the suggestion of passion in his final crime, and (Irish again) had ignored the fact that on the criminal's own showing the crime conceived in passion had been carried through with a cold-blooded meanness of which Callaghan's own nature had no trace. Lastly, he was genuinely puzzled by the problem as to the morality of

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vengeance which Vane-Cartwright had raised with so dexterously slight a touch.

Whatever his motive, Callaghan was upon the point of resolving that, at least from his own room, where the criminal had come to appeal to his mercy, that criminal should go away free. And if Callaghan had so resolved I should have been powerless for a time; he was prepared and I was not as to the steps immediately to be taken to secure Vane-Cartwright's arrest. But it seems, if for once I may use that phrase with so little or else so deep a meaning, that the luck had departed from Vane-Cartwright. At this crisis of his fate a device of his own recoiled upon him with terrible force.

"I cannot do it! I cannot do it!" Callaghan was exclaiming, when the door opened and a telegram was brought for me. This was the message: "Clarissa terribly ill, symptoms poison, Bancroft, Fidele". It meant that my wife was dying at the friend's villa to which she

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hand. He knew enough to understand the message well. He read it with an altered face. He passed it to Vane-Cartwright and said: "Read that, and take it for my answer". I should doubt if Vane-Cartwright had often been violently angry, but he was now. He dashed the telegram down with a curse. "The fool," he said, and he gasped with passion, "if he was going to try that trick, why did not he do it before?" Callaghan stepped up to me, put his big arms round me, and for a moment hugged me in them, with tears in his eyes. Then without a word he strode across the room, and, before I could see what was happening, Vane-Cartwright's hands were tied behind his back with a great silk handkerchief.

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CHAPTER XXII.

My story draws towards its close, and of mystery or of sudden peril it has little more to tell. Upon one point, the most vital to me, let me not give the reader a moment's suspense. My wife did not die of poison, had not been poisoned, had not been ill, had not sent that telegram. What had happened was this: on one single occasion she had not despatched her own message herself; through the misunderstanding or too prompt courtesy of her host's butler, the telegram which she had written had been taken by a messenger, and it had fallen into the hands of the enemy's watchful emissary. It had revealed to him the password which my wife used to me; and in its place there had gone over the wires a message which would indeed have called me back at any stage of the

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I say not later, for indeed I have evidence strong enough for my now suspicious mind that Vane-Cartwright had endeavoured to prepare his escape in the event of his failure to persuade Callaghan and myself. An unoccupied flat immediately below Callaghan's had the day before been engaged by a nameless man, who paid a quarter's rent in advance, and on the day of his interview with us, several strange persons, who were never seen there again, arrived with every sign of belated haste; but, whatever accident had delayed them, they arrived a quarter of an hour after we had left.

And so on the 15th of May, 1897, nearly sixteen months after Peters' death, his murderer was handed over to the police, with information which, including as it did the fact of his confession, ensured their taking him into custody.

Then I, in my turn, became Callaghan's prisoner. I arrived at Charing Cross station in good time for the night train, and found my luggage already there and registered, and my

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staying. One item remains untold to complete for the present the account of the debt which I owe him. We had hardly left Charing Cross when his quick wits arrived at precisely that explanation of the telegram which in happy fact was true; but all the way, talkative man though he was, he refrained from vexing my bruised mind with a hope which, he knew, I should not be able to trust.

When he had learnt at the door that his happy foreboding was true, no entreaty would induce him to stay and break bread. He returned at once to England, leaving me to enter alone to that reunion of which I need say nothing, nor even tell how much two people had hungered for it.

The reader who is curious in such matters might almost reconstruct for himself (in spite of the newspaper reports which naturally are misleading) the trial of William Vane-Cartwright. He might pick out from these pages the facts capable of legal proof, which, once proved and once marshalled into their places, could leave no reasonable doubt of the prisoner's guilt.

But, however late, the trained intelligence of the police had now been applied to the matter, and the case wore an altered aspect. No start-

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ling discovery had come to pass, only the revelation of the obvious. Some points had been ascertained which ought to have been ascertained long before; still more, facts long known had been digested, as, surely, it should have been somebody's business to digest them from the first. In particular, tardy attention had been paid to the report of the young constable who, as I mentioned, followed Sergeant Speke into Peters' room, and who had incurred some blame because his apparent slowness had allowed some trespassers to come and make footprints on the lawn (I fancy his notes had been overlooked when some officer in charge of the case had been superseded by another). The observed movements, just after the crime, of two or three people who were about the scene, had been set down in order. Enquiries, such as only authority could make, had ultimately been made among Vane-Cartwright's acquaintance in the East, and though disappointing in the main, they yielded one fact of importance. Moreover, the researches which were made by Callaghan shortly after the murder, and which I had sup-

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to Paris, he had given to the police at Exeter some scrappy and ill-explained notes; and on a subsequent visit, which I have mentioned, to Scotland Yard, he had handed in a long and over-elaborate memorandum. These now received justice. I must, therefore, attempt to state, with dry accuracy, the case which was actually presented against the accused.

Upon the fact that he had confessed his guilt, though indeed it reversed the surface improbability that a man in his position was a criminal, I must lay no separate emphasis. Neither judge nor prosecuting counsel did so. The defence dealt with it upon a theory which turned it to positive advantage. I myself can well conceive that a man, to whom his life was little and his reputation much, might have taken the risk of a false confession to us in the hope of binding us to silence.

But, to begin, Peters was without doubt

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the report was false; but he never reappeared; several witnesses (traced out by the enquiry of the police in the East) appeared at the trial, and swore that Vane-Cartwright had often spoken of Longhurst's sailing in that ship; yet he must, according to Mr. Bryanston's evidence, have known that this was false; and, according to the same evidence, he had been in Longhurst's company after the time when the rest of Longhurst's neighbours last saw him. From this (though the other proved facts of their connexion amounted to little more than they were reputed partners) it followed that Vane-Cartwright was in a position in which suspicion of foul play towards Longhurst might easily fall on him.

Next, Peters at the time of his death not merely entertained this suspicion but was taking steps to obtain proof of its truth; for there were his letters to Bryanston and to Verschoyle still extant, and admissible in evidence as *res gestæ*, the actual first steps which he had taken with this aim.

Next, Vane-Cartwright knew of Peters' sus-

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first evening when he had seen the two men together their intercourse had at first been easy, but that by the end of the evening something had happened which completely altered their manners; the one became abstracted and aloof, the other eagerly watched him. Of the talk which caused this change Callaghan had only caught Peters' question, "sailed in what," but it was evident now to what that question referred. It was in itself strange that after this Vane-Cartwright should have availed himself of a general invitation given by Peters earlier, and have come rather suddenly to his house, putting off (as it was now shown) for that purpose a previous important engagement. It was a sinister fact that, before he did so, he had set on foot mysterious enquiries, some of which related to the two men to whom, in his presence, Peters had written letters about the affair of Longhurst, while the rest, though less obviously, appeared to be connected with the same matter. The first fruits of these enquiries (and they were telling) had been, by his arrangement, brought to him on the very afternoon before the murder. After the murder he had, it now seemed plain, stayed on at my house merely in the hope

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of intercepting Bryanston's answer. By what means he knew that the sting of Dr. Verschoyle lay in his journals cannot be conjectured, but there was no mistaking the purpose with which, a little later, he obtained these journals by deceit. Altogether his conduct had been that of a man in whom Peters had aroused an anxiety so intense as to form a possible motive for murdering him.

And altogether his conduct after the murder bore, now that it could be fully traced, the flagrant aspect of guilt. He had unlatched the window; this was now certain, though of course of that act by itself an innocent account might be given. The reader knows too the whole course of his action in regard to Trethewy and his family, beginning with the lie, which made him appear as screening Trethewy when in fact he was plotting his undoing, and ending with his breaking in upon my talk with Ellen Trethewy, who had stood where she might have seen him making those tracks in the snow. The making

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seen him in the field, where those tracks and no others were just afterwards found; Ellen Trethewy had seen him start to go there and again seen him returning. Yet, though the two corroborated each other, there might be some doubt of the inference to be drawn from what Ellen Trethewy saw (that depended on knowledge of the ground), and of the correctness of the observation made by Thalberg from afar. After all, was it absolutely impossible that Trethewy had through some strange impulse, rational or irrational, made those tracks himself,—perhaps, with his sense of guilt and in the over-refinement of half-drunken cunning, he had fabricated against himself a case which he thought he could break down.

But here the late revealed evidence came in. It was certain, first, that those tracks did not exist in the morning. The constable who had let the trespassers come in stopped them when he found them, and noted carefully how far they had gone; he got one of them, an enterprising young journalist, to verify his observation, and it resulted in this, that the part of the lawn where those guilty tracks began was absolutely untrodden then. Next it was certain now that

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throughout the time when those tracks were made Trethewy had been in his house. Now, when the whole course of events that morning was considered, there could be no doubt that those tracks were made by some one who knew exactly what the situation was. Since it was not Trethewy, it lay between Sergeant Speke, myself, Callaghan and Vane-Cartwright. Sergeant Speke and I could easily give account of our time that day, but I think I mentioned that there had arisen some doubt as to where Callaghan had been just at the critical hour. It was explained now; Callaghan had been too far away; just at that time he had gone again to the hotel, moved by one of his restless impulses to try and spy upon Thalberg. It lay then beyond doubt that the tracks were made by Vane-Cartwright, and it was beyond doubt why he made them.

But the case did not rest there. The front door of Grenvile Combe had been bolted on the inside that night, before Peters died. Presumably Peters did it; anyway Vane-Cartwright and Callaghan, as they had said next morning, found it bolted when they came down disturbed by the noise, and themselves bolted it again; and Peters

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was then living, for they heard him in his room. The other doors had been bolted in like manner by the servants. Every window but two had also been latched. The doors had remained bolted till the servants were about in the morning, when Peters must have been some hours dead. The fastened windows were still fastened when we came to the house (a window in the back servants' quarters had been open for a short while in the morning, but the servants had been about all the time), for the constable, before he obeyed the Sergeant and began his search outside, had been in every room and noticed every fastening. The two exceptions were Vane-Cartwright's own open window, which did not matter, and the little window at the back, already named as a possible means of entrance. Careful experiment had now been made (Callaghan had long ago suggested it), and it showed that, whoever could climb to that window, only an infant could pass through it.

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inmate of the house, by the housemaid, or by the cook, or by Vane-Cartwright, or by Callaghan. Now the housemaid and the cook had passed a wakeful night; the disturbance in the road had aroused them and left them agitated and alarmed; each was therefore able to swear that the other had remained all night in the bedroom which they shared. Therefore, Peters was murdered either by Vane-Cartwright or by Callaghan.

And why not, it might be asked, by Callaghan, against whom at one time such good grounds of suspicion were to be found? The reader must by this time have seen that the eccentric and desultory proceedings of Callaghan, even his strange whim of staying in that crime-stricken house and the silly talk with which he had put me off about his aim, had, as he once boasted to me, a method, which though odd and over-ingenious, was rational and very acute. The neglected memorandum he had made for the police was enough in itself (without his frankness under cross-examination) to set his proceedings since the murder in a clear light. Callaghan, moreover, was the life-long friend of Peters. True it was that (as the defence scented out) he had owed Peters £2,000, and Peters' will

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forgave the debt. True, but it was now proved no less true, that since that will was made the debt had been paid, and paid in a significant manner. Callaghan had first remitted to Peters £500 from India. Peters, thereupon, had sent Callaghan an acquittance of the whole debt. Callaghan's response was an immediate payment of £250 more. And the balance, £1,250, had been paid a very few days before Peters was killed. This was what an ill-inspired cross-examination revealed, and if the guilt lay between Vane-Cartwright and Callaghan, there could be no doubt which was the criminal.

So Callaghan and I had gone through tangled enquiries and at least some perilous adventures to solve a puzzle of which the solution lay all the while at our feet, and at the feet of others.

It would be melancholy now to dwell on the daring and brilliance of the defence. No witness was called for it. It opened with a truly impressive treatment of Vane-Cartwright's confession; and the broken state of his temperament, originally sensitive and now harassed by suspicion and persecution, was described with

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hard man in the dock a transient glow of human sympathy. Every other part of his conduct, so far as it was admitted, was made the subject of an explanation, by itself plausible. But little was admitted. Every separate item of the evidence was made the subject of a doubt, by itself reasonable. If a witness had been called to tell some very plain matter of fact, that kind of plain fact under one's eyes was notoriously the sort of thing about which the most careless mistakes were made. If a witness had had a longer tale to tell he had revealed some poisonous pre-possession. I, for example, a most deleterious type of cleric, had, besides a prejudice against unorthodox Vane-Cartwright, an animus to defend Trethewy, arising from that sickly sentiment towards Miss Trethewy which I betrayed when I fled to her from my ailing family at Florence. In Trethewy's case again there had been a confession of a very different order; and the suggestion was dexterously worked that something still lay concealed behind Trethewy's story. Withal the vastness of the region of possibility was exhibited with vigorous appeals to the imagination. Strong in every part, the defence as a whole was bound

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to be weak; the fatality which made so many lies and blunders work together for evil was beyond belief; the conduct which needed so much psychology to defend it was indefensible.

So the verdict was given and the sentence was passed.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

ONCE again I saw William Vane-Cartwright. At his own request I was summoned to visit him in the gaol. It was not the interview of penitent and confessor; none the less I am bound to silence about it, even though my silence may involve the suppression of something which tells in his favour. One thing I may and must say. Part of his object in sending for me was to make me his agent in several acts of kindness.

As I look back, I often ask myself: Was there indeed no truth, beyond what we knew, in the tale that this man told to Callaghan and me, and which was skilfully woven to accord as far as possible with many things which we might have and had in fact discovered. In point of vital facts it was certainly false. I could now disprove every syllable of that love story; his acquaintance with Miss Denison was only a few months old; she had never known

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Peters; and the letter that he showed us was a forgery of course. I happen, moreover, too late for any useful purpose, to have met several people who knew Longhurst well; all agree that he was rough and uncompanionable, all that he was strictly honest and touchingly kind; all testify that in his later days he was a total abstainer.

Yet, in the face of this, I believe that Vane-Cartwright described fairly, as well as with insight, the influences which in boyhood and early manhood told so disastrously upon him. I now know, as it happens, a good deal about his parents, for one of my present neighbours was a family friend of theirs. They were a gifted but eccentric couple, with more "principles" than any two heads can safely hold. Little as I like their beliefs, I cannot but suspect that their home life was governed by a conscientiousness and a tender affection for their child, from which, if he had wished to be guided right, some light must have fallen on his path. Yet without doubt their training was as bad a preparation as could be for what he was to under-

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Almost everything in his surroundings there jarred upon his sensibility which on the æsthetic side was more than commonly keen. Dozens of English lads pass through just such trials unshaken, some even unspotted, but they have been far otherwise nurtured than he. Peters too had an influence upon his youth. I, who knew Peters so well, know that he cannot have done the spiteful things which Vane-Cartwright said, but I do not doubt for one moment that he did repel his young associate when he need not have done so. Peters was young too, and may well be forgiven, but I can imagine that by that chill touch he sped his comrade on the downward course which chanced to involve his own murder.

Altogether it is easy enough to form some image, not merely monstrous, of the way in which that character formed itself out of its surroundings; to understand how the poor lad became more and more centred in himself; to praise him just in so far as that concentration was strength; to note where that strength lay,

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That motive, a calculated resolve to be wealthy, to become detached in outward fact as he was already in feeling from the sort of people and the sort of surroundings amid which his present lot was cast, had already been formed when the partnership with Longhurst offered him his opportunity. One may well believe him that the three years of that partnership cost him much. His one companion was a man whom, I take it, he was incapable of liking, and his position at first was one of subjection to him. He had lied to us much about Longhurst, but I fancy that he had spoken of him with genuine, however unjust, dislike. What particular fraud he played upon him, or whether it was, strictly speaking, a fraud at all, I do not know. But no doubt he was by nature mean (though ready enough to spend money), and he was probably more mean when his strength was not full fledged and his nascent

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many relations of life, harder than laymen think to keep quite out of reach of the law by any less painful course than that of positive honesty. Let us suppose that he did only the sort of thing which his own confession implied, obtaining for himself alone the renewal of concessions originally made to his firm. Even so, I understand, he may have found himself in this position, that Longhurst would have been entitled to his share (the half or perhaps much more, according to the terms of partnership) of extremely valuable assets upon which Vane-Cartwright had counted as his own. Moreover, that possibly stupid man would have had his voice about the vital question of how and when to sell this property.

Even if this was all, it still meant that the hope upon which Vane-Cartwright had set his soul, the hope not of a competence but of eminent wealth, was about to slip away, and to slip away perhaps irretrievably. For, as I have lately learnt, he was then ill, could not remain in that climate, would not, if he fell down

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which then arose he was not the man to set his personal safety in the scales against his ambition. And so the incredible deed was done, and fortune favoured the murderer with the report that his victim had been lost in a wrecked ship (possibly even he had met with that report before he killed him). Henceforward, watchful as he had to be for a while, the chief burden which his guilt laid upon him was that of bearing himself with indifference.

Thirteen years had passed, years of unvarying success. The watchfulness was now seldom needed, and the indifference had become a pose. And so at last, on his first evening at Grenvile Combe, he fell talking in his wonted way of Longhurst, and gave that false account of his end to one of the only two living men with whom it behoved him to take care. Instantly the spectre of his crime, which he thought had been laid, confronted him, and confronted him, as some recollection warned him, with the real peril of public shame, perhaps conviction and death. Instantly too there arose, as if to his aid, not as yet the full strength of his intellect and courage, but the ingrained, dormant spirit of crime. If he had only said to Peters, "He sailed

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in the *Eleanor* with me. I killed him. I will tell you all about it," I have not a shadow of a doubt that his confession would have been kept inviolate. Only there were trials from which even his nerve recoiled, and plain facts of human nature which his acuteness never saw. So the same deed was done again in quiet reliance upon that wonderful luck which this time also had provided him with a screen against suspicion, and this time also seemed to require nothing of him after the act was accomplished except to bear himself carelessly. Indeed, though he began to bear himself carelessly too soon—for he trusted characteristically that Peters had this night followed the practice of opening the window, which he was oddly fond of preaching, and he left the room without troubling to look behind the curtain—his confidence seemed justified. There was nothing in the room or in the house, nothing under the wide vault of that starlit sky that was destined to tell the tale.

Morning brought to his eyes, though not yet to his comprehension, the presence of a huge calamity, for the ground was white with snow in which, if Trethewy had come through it, his tracks would still be seen. Soon he heard that

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Trethewy had in fact come home when the snow lay there. Then at last his whole mind rose to the full height of the occasion, to a height of composure and energy from which in all his later doings he never declined far. I have an unbounded hatred for that prevalent worship of strong men which seems to me to be born of craven fear. Yet it extorts my most unwilling admiration of this man that, when safety depended so much upon inaction, the only action he took was such as at once was appallingly dangerous and yet was the only way to avoid an even greater peril.

But strangely enough as I shut my mind against that haunting memory which I have written these pages to expel, far different traits and incidents from this keep longest their hold upon my imagination. I remember Peters not as he died but as he lived; and the murderer stands before me, as I take my leave, not in virtue of signal acts of crime (which I could more easily have forgiven) but of little acts, words, even tones of hardness and of concentrated selfishness, faintly noted in my story, rendered darker to me by the knowledge that he could be courteous and kind when it suited him. He

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stands there as the type to me, not of that rare being the splendid criminal, but of the man who in the old phrase is "without bowels". And men (on whose souls also may God have mercy) are not rare among us, who, without his intellect or his daring, are as hard as he, but for whom, through circumstances—not uncommon and I do not call them fortunate—the path of consistent selfishness does not diverge from the path of a respectable life.

Strangely too, one of those lesser acts of unkindness was needed to bring about his downfall. If I had never seen him at Florence, the spark of my baffled ire would not have been rekindled, nor could I have met Trethewy's family till they had gone beyond the seas. And I should never have seen him at Florence but that my wife, who did not know his name, recalled upon seeing him that little delinquency at Crema of which she and I can think no longer with any personal spleen. It seems as if he might have murdered his partner and murdered his host with cruel

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machinery of fate, and it came to pass in the end that the red hand of the law seized him and dealt to him the doom which the reader has long foreseen.

. . . . . .

Let some surviving characters of this story briefly bid farewell. For my wife and me, we are settled in our country rectory, so near in distance to London and in effect so far off; and, if the now delightful labours of my calling seem to me not more unsuccessful than perhaps they should always seem to the labourer, I like to think it means that what Eustace Peters, half-unknowing, did for me abides.

Callaghan was our guest not two months ago, a welcome guest to us, and even more to our children. He talked alternately of a project of land reclamation on the Wash and of an immediate departure for the East in search of a clue to the questions left unsolved in these pages. He has since departed from this country, not, I believe, for the East, but neither we nor any of his friends know where he is, or doubt that wherever he is, he can take care of himself and will hurt no other creature. Mr. Thalberg continues his law business in the City, though the business

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has changed in character. I bear him no ill-will, and yet am sorry to be told that (while the disclosures in the trial lost him several old clients, as well as his clerk, Mr. Manson) on the whole his business has grown. Trethewy is now our gardener. His daughter is a board-school mistress in London. I hope he will long remain with us, for I now like him as a man but could not lay it upon my conscience to recommend him as a gardener. Peters' nephews, unseen by the reader, have hovered close in the background of my tale. Both have distinguished themselves in India. Yesterday I married the elder to Miss Denison, on whom, I hope, the reader has bestowed a thought. In the other, who is engaged to my eldest daughter, his uncle's peculiar gifts repeat themselves more markedly and with greater promise of practical achievement.

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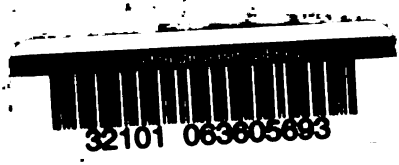
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